THE PROPHETS IN THE LIGHT OF TO-DAY

JOHN GODFREY HILL

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A church without prophets would
die of paralysis & one with nothing
but prophets would die of convulsions
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THE PROPHETS IN THE LIGHT OF TO-DAY

BY
JOHN GODFREY HILL
Professor of Religious Education in the University of Southern California

INTRODUCTION BY
F. M. LARKIN

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TO

A HOST OF DEVOTED STUDENTS

"Teaching is personal propagation"

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INTRODUCTION

THIS book is timely and of the greatest importance in our modern life. Never since the advent of Christ has it been more important to understand the permanent teachings of the Hebrew prophets, who spoke not only for their own time but for all time. They deal with fundamental and universal truth in relation to individual and national conduct.

No thoughtful person can overlook the fact that the civilization of the world is passing through one of the most appalling crises in all history. The boom of the first cannon in the great European war was the announcement of the beginning of a new age. Suddenly and swiftly has history been made. With the ceasing of the war the transition has been made. The world never again will be what it was before the war.

Much depends upon the attitude the world governments are to take upon fundamental principles of human nature when

reconstruction is made. In no way can we understand better what the great God has been trying to teach man in all the past and in the present than by a proper understanding of the permanency of the ancient Hebrew prophets. A misunderstanding of their messages will result disastrously to the church and the world.

Professor Hill has given much attention to this line of study, and the church will be grateful to him for the publication of these lectures in permanent form. For many years he has been coming in contact with the mature minds in the University of Southern California, and from personal testimony, which has come to the writer, we know that he has been exceptionally successful in leading young people out of their intellectual doubts into a clear, bright, earnest Christian faith. The Prophets in the Light of To-day has been written in touch with the vital issues of the classroom which have given him an exceptional insight into what people of to-day want to know about the Hebrew prophets in their relation to the development of modern civilization.

When pastor of University Church I found young people who were devout Christians having great difficulty in adjusting their faith to their intellectual light and growth. They were attempting to think their religion in the symbolism of their childhood, which was taught to them in the Sunday school, and were unable to adjust it to their more mature intellectual college life. A great deal of skepticism has thus resulted from a failure to teach our young people to think properly about God and religion. A large number of the skeptics who are coming from our State universities are the result of being taught to think about material things in a modern way, while little is done to teach them as a man ought to think about spiritual things. Professor Hill's successful experience in helping this class of young men to revalue their faith makes his book especially welcome to the larger public.

F. M. Larkin.

FOREWORD

THE purpose of this little book is to attract busy people to the grandeur of the Hebrew prophets. Especially persons distressed with doubts or yearning to know the modern views on religious values may receive help. It is also the purpose to help correct, without needless offense, prevalent unscholarly misuse of prophecy. It is hoped that these chapters may help to bring the needlessly conservative student into a more hospitable attitude toward the modern religious trend of thought without losing any of his fervor. There is need of a careful reappraisement of spiritual values in the light of to-day. In the present reconstruction period the spirit and ideas of the prophets are especially timely. The better day will be hastened by placing a saner and higher value upon spiritual realities.

David Grayson's reflection about his farmer friend, Horace, and himself, that "we have been the best of friends in the

way of whiffle-trees, butter tubs, and pig killings, but never once looked up together at the sky," may serve as a blanket confession for our workaday-world. We are caught in the treadmill of "getting on," and are damaging body and damning soul in the forced scramble for a livelihood. The most smothering feature of modern life is its absorbing practicality. Grayson's further confession that "throughout many feverish years I did not work, I merely produced," fairly labels our truck-driven age. One hoped-for result of the present studies of the prophets is that these preoccupied neighbors of ours may learn to "look up together at the sky" and "trust a little in God."

The prophets were sky-gazers and would teach us moderns to look starward. Amazing material achievements have outrun the more meager spiritual results. Success has formed a kind of conspiracy against the spiritual life. The world crisis, however, has cleared the way for a fresh approach to the unseen realities. The guidance of the prophets is, therefore, timely.

The prophetic material has been selected

because it records the highest expression of religion, and also because the present crisis has stimulated a fresh interest in prophetic predictions, believed by many to find their fulfillment in the present world movement. Unless a common-sense view be taken of prophetic utterances many good people will be misled and sadly disappointed should the "signs" fail of fulfillment, as they have done so often before.

The attempt is made to treat in a living, practical way those problems of religion which are of practical interest and vital concern to honest seekers after "a working faith." The viewpoint taken, therefore, is that which is commonly held by progressive Christian leaders of the day. By common agreement these leaders interpret Christianity in harmony with scientific, psychological, and sociological truthfulness. This viewpoint is what may be termed *progressive orthodoxy*.

In a way this book is the accumulated result of years of effort to make a working faith possible where outworn conceptions have ceased to carry intellectual respect.

Hence, only topics of living interest make up the chapters that follow. They have received such treatment as has proved most helpful to pastors and people, teachers and students.

It has seemed to the writer that the Bible material needs to be popularized and modernized in order that it may play the guiding and controlling role which it deserves in modern life. To effect this end, several things have been attempted: first, to give only positive and needful results of modern biblical scholarship; second, to preserve a passionate spiritual tone; third, to present progressive ideas in plain modern speech; fourth, to treat questions involved in a sane, brief, and honest manner. The reader will be the judge in that matter.

The author gratefully acknowledges help received from many friends and stimulating books. It is not possible to cite the sources of ideas and suggestions used which have been accumulated during many years of study and teaching. Materials of public ownership have been worked over into a new, and let us hope, fresh setting. The

author has tried to strike a happy medium between "cold critical scholarship" on the one hand, and "inaccurate devotional literature" on the other hand. The writer is convinced that a fervid spirit and a fair accuracy joined together will aid to make the Bible ideal winsome. If this book shall further that end, the author will be content.

J. G. H.

CHAPTER I

THE PROPHETS IN RELATION TO OUR TWISTED AGE

What?

The most momentous decision in history is now in the balance. All former world molds lie broken, and the social fragments must now be recast. Who is to take the contract? This is a fair and fearful challenge to trained Christian men and women. Since the lines in Picardy and Flanders have won the war, a new world is in the making. The period of reconstruction is, therefore, a momentous hour for the Christian Church. Her finest teachers and preachers, scholars and statesmen, laymen and laborers, must seize this world moment for Christ.

The awful conflict which recently raged on the trenched fields of Europe presents a world of agonizing problems. The troubled waters run far deeper than the issue between

opposing political ideals. "The worth of the whole structure of modern civilization is being put to the test." Everything is being subjected to revaluation. In the melting-pot of the world's crisis cherished customs, time-honored institutions, and long-established ideals are being refined by the fires of the great conflict.

Whither?

We are on our way to a new humanity with different racial values and ideals. This fact is being anticipated by the titles of new books. Nicholas Murray Butler calls it The World in Ferment; Harry Emerson Fosdick, The Challenge of the Present Crisis; Mrs. Humphry Ward, Towards the Goal; and Butler in another of his books, The International Mind. In the face of this crisis, Adams Brown might well ask in the title of his virile volume, "Is Christianity Practicable?" The daring John Galsworthy takes up the new challenge in his recent novel Beyond, and permits young, beautiful "Gyp" to pass "beyond" the bounds of old settled conventions. This

daring and dramatic story seems to fling the new departures in our faces by asking, "Was she justified in taking the step?" In that question and in that novel may be seen the modern man's effort to break with the conservative Past and to face up to a radical Future. But there are titles that sound a note of warning, such as Katherine Holland Brown's The Wages of Honor, for we are in some danger of "Running Free," as James B. Connolly puts it in his humorous book of racy sea stories. Henry van Dyke seems positively alarmed lest the "Blond Beast" be "enthroned in the place of God." We must make certain that the new order takes on Christ or we shall be undone.

Providentially, the Christian Church is being urged forward by the new struggle it is forced to wage to meet the changing order of society. It must be evident to all that great changes are in progress both within and without the Christian Church. In every branch of the church we have heard for a generation much about the "higher" and the "lower critics," the "liberals" and the "conservatives," the "heterodox" and the "ortho-

dox." The way of science is gaining more respect. The newer secular education is taking a firmer grip on our youth. Social improvement and psychological tests are coming forward with new aids to the gospel of human betterment.

The significance of the gospel of Jesus Christ for the life of our age is being both broadened and intensified. A new interpretation of the gospel is imperative, and a finer life of the saint is mandatory, if Christianity is to exercise the controlling influence in the new world.

Abner Daniel's observation about the Tinsleys in The New Clarion puts the matter well: "Me'n' her git along all right, but I can't stomach that sanctimonious husband o' her'n. He's so ready fer the next life that he's out o' joint in this un, an' makes everybody else uncomfortable."

How?

That new order will not be ushered in in the spectacular manner of a cloud-burst. It is not to be a free gift from the skies, but a gritty grind from the ground. Only as

God works in us and through us here and now, will we be able to bring about his purpose for a better world and a nobler society. A new sense of the need of world improvement, a new sympathy with all movements which strive for a better society, a clearer grasp of practical methods which will secure good results are God's messengers to urge us on to more strenuous endeavor. While individual rectitude must not slacken, international ethics must also come. No mere local and fitful, conventional and formal application of the gospel will save the world and restore the church to its rightful place in society. Nothing short of a fresh interpretation of the gospel, a simpler view of faith, a clearer understanding of the Christian ideal, a truer exhibition of Christian conduct, and a broader application of the Christian program to the world's problems will satisfy the emerging needs of a world writhing in the birth-pangs of a new era.

"The immensity of the war," writes Ralph Barton Perry, "lies not only in its area and volume, but in the profoundness and complexity of its issues. The outcome is going

to determine not only what nation shall survive, but what institutions and ideas shall survive. It is not merely a question of *who* shall prove strongest, but of *what form of life* shall prove strongest."

When?

The massive truths of the prophets, reiterated by Jesus with spiritual clearness, need now to be reaffirmed and centrally fixed in the life of society. Their passionate appeals to practical justice, downright honesty, and social equality, to reverence the one and holy God, to recognize his purpose in history, and to establish the divine kingdom of good on earth, are at this hour the crying needs of the bleeding world. From the mouths of our ministers the prophets speak across the centuries to the men on our streets. For it is given to the prophet class that lives on the divine side of life to keep alive the elemental moral sense of mankind. Never were the sermons of the prophets more timely than now, for they deal with the ever-recurring moral, social, and political problems of society. Modern social and

political prophets catch unfailing inspiration from these voices of the past with which to shed fresh light on our twisted age, and thus gain a new spiritual ascendency.

May the Christian leaders, like the prophets of old, keep the divine vision clear, the human spirit steady, the well-springs of sympathy flowing, the lamp of truth burning, and the social atmosphere sweet, lest the world's Gethsemane end in a trenched grave without a resurrection.

CHAPTER II

THE PROPHETS AND THEIR INSPIRATION

HAUNTED as we are to-day by scientific ghosts, it is impossible to read the Bible thoughtfully without being taunted by the questions: In what sense is the Bible the veritable Word of God? How can the imperfect and finite speak the mind of the Perfect and Infinite? If human errors have crept into the divine record, how may we know the true from the false? These are practical questions which dog the footstseps of the modern man's religious wanderings. To the thoughtful, earnest, honest soul these mental ghosts must be met and slain or his Bible is for him a haunted book, wherein dismaying surprises may appear at any turn. That the God of life and all things has spoken in the Bible, and through it yet speaks to the human heart, no one can well doubt, and few indeed do doubt it. The

verdict of human experience for centuries has been that the Bible reveals adequately God's will and way for man. Sir Walter Scott, on his deathbed, is reported to have said, pointing to his library, "Hand me the Book." When asked, "What book?" he replied, "There is but one book, the Book!" Yet the very greatness of the book raises for us more keenly the questions above, for any apparent flaw in an otherwise perfect work is the more noticeable and disturbing. Hence we are the more pained and puzzled at finding what appear to be imperfect statements therein.

These problems, however, are not to be settled by off-hand declarations or dictionary definitions, but by candid consideration. The son of a minister told his father that the dictionary defined "collect" and "congregate" to mean the same thing. "Perhaps they do, my son," said the venerable clergyman, "but there is a vast difference between a congregation and a collection." Likewise there may be a vast difference between the facts and dogmas of inspiration and revelation. Inspiration is necessary to revelation.

Revelation is, of course, the result of inspiration. Man is the means; God is the source; inspiration is the spur; revelation is the content; and the Bible is the record. Revelation is continued and varied as the inspiration fluctuates in the subject. Flower, fowl, and folk are all so many unlike forms of God's handiwork. That is to say, our psychic nature is fashioned to search after God as the bee hunts for honey. In the normal craving of our souls we find the warrant for religion. This craving God satisfies with his Spirit as he does flowers with sunshine. The Bible directs us to the divine store where satisfaction for the soul is to be found.

Modern Theories of Prophetic Inspiration

How, then, shall we understand prophetic inspiration? There is, I think, no considerable disposition at the present to doubt the vital fact of human inspiration and consequent divine revelation. Devout students of the Word merely differ as to manner, form, and condition under which inspiration

takes place. These views are commonly held:

1. That God immediately and unerringly revealed all things to holy men of old, differently from anything which occurs to-day.

2. That it is all the product of human development, essentially the same as all other development of nature.

3. That the method of divine revelation has been an historic process of divine accommodation to human limitations. God, through his indwelling Spirit, lifted man into higher and newer meanings by way of old customs, symbols, institutions, imparting to them, and through them, nobler ideas from age to age. Even Saint Paul found it necessary to say, "For now we see through a glass, darkly; but then face to face" (1 Cor. 13. 12).

Whichever of these theories be the nearest correct may not be demonstrated. It seems, however, that the third one mentioned fits best into our time, and holds several advantages over the others for our modern mode of thought. Our conquest of nature has given us a new grip on the mate-

rial world, and our scientific method of thought has given us a new interpretation of the world. More of order and law has made less of miracle and caprice, as the modern man looks at it. Explanations of inspiration must not do violence to this respect for nature on the one hand, nor the longing for spiritual realities in men's lives on the other hand. The last theory respects both; while the other two choose one and exclude the other.

Man's Place in the Process of Inspiration

The third theory mentioned in no way belittles God and his self-manifestation in the world. Special revelation is not denied by being accommodated to human conditions as the Bible shows them to have existed.

This way of looking at it gives man an active place in divine revelation. No violence is done to human nature as we know it. No issue is forced between views of science and religion. It finds modern psychology an ally and friend. William James, in this connection, speaks of the "psycho-

pathic level of sudden perception or conviction of new truth . . . the unseen region in question . . . produces effects in this world. God is real since he produces real effects."[1]

Earthly Materials in Divine Forms

It gives meaning to Bible history as showing the gradual growth of revelation in accord with scriptural facts. It shows the heritage of the past to have contributed to the making of the present. The events of the present were fashioned into new products in the hot crucible of prophetic experience. From his heated soul the sparks flew in forms of hope and fear, doubt and certainty, joy and sorrow, success and failure. But in the ordeal the prophet beheld the form of One invisible. On the one hand the prophet followed his religious intuitions; on the other hand he seized the earthly material at his feet to transmit the heavenly grace. The man of God lifted into new meaning old symbols, put to sacred uses secular objects, and filled heathen words with holy

[1] William James, The Varieties of Religious Experience, pp. 516, 517.

contents. Old customs, old institutions, old phrases were invested with new meanings in the wake of wider experiences in the light of God. Thus earthly materials are often molded into the divine forms.

In the mouths of the prophets heathen words acquired holy uses. Where once they carried low, even base contents, taken up into Hebrew usage they are filled with lofty meaning. Note, for instance, the prophetic use of the word *Qadosh,* "holy" (Isa. 6), applied to Jehovah. The three meanings most often attached to this word in its various forms are: (1) in reference to holy things (a new relation); (2) the Holy One (separate from all else); the Transcendent One; (3) holy persons (as priests belonging to God as his peculiar property). Since Jehovah is holy, all that is used for or by him must be worthy of him. Hence only a clean, sound, perfect, unblemished vessel, thing, or person is fit for divine use. So that not only Jehovah is *Qadosh,* that is, clean, whole, separate from all that partakes of evil, but all persons in his service must be clean and sound.

Then we find *Qadash,* "to be dedicated"; *Qodesth,* "to be hallowed"; and *Qadosh,* "saintly." Now, *Qadash* was an old Semitic word which meant in heathen circles "to withdraw," "to set apart." On the one hand a thing may be forbidden because it was unclean and, therefore, untouchable; or, on the other hand, it may be too sacred, too clean to be defiled by common hands. Thus, the same word may and did carry opposite meanings. Forms of this word appear among the Semitic peoples with varied meanings. Among the Assyrians *Qadasu* meant "to cleanse," and a thing that was *Qadistu* was consecrated by purification.

An exact parallel is found in 2 Chronicles 29. 19 and 30. 17, where the word is used in this sense concerning temple vessels and concerning the people at the time of the passover. *Qadesh* was a word used by the corrupt Canaanites to designate young women set apart for immoral purposes at the sacred shrines—temple prostitutes, always closely associated with nature religions. When a Hebrew writer speaks of the immoral women of Canaanite shrines,

he will not use *Qadesh,* but will use *Zonah* instead. Thus, a heathen term, used in the lowest way, was lifted to the highest and purest meaning by the Hebrew sacred writers, and even given a place in the prophetic doctrines of the "Holy God." How the meaning of the term has been transformed by dropping the low heathen contents!

God's self-revelation, accommodating itself to human conditions, working through prophet and the very growth of a language, gained this splendid result. The refining Hebrew fire passed over many heathen words, signs, and institutions, burning out the dross and leaving naught but gold.

The same holds true of the Sabbath. Other Semites had sacred days, but the Hebrews gave to their Sabbath a new and distinct character. The root *Sabbath* in Hebrew, as the Arab *Sabata,* means "to cut off" or "cease from"—hence, to quit work.

God's revelation of his dwelling place is especially indicative of his accommodation to human progress. Sacred places, where gods were supposed to resort and where

men might meet them, were common among all nations. Many sacred spots were long recognized by the Hebrews, Bethel, Shechem, Hebron, Shiloh, Carmel, etc. At length, Jerusalem was looked upon as Jehovah's earthly sanctuary. All worship centralized there. Nay more, within the temple, in the very Holy of holies only, Jehovah was to be found. Then broke the light, the most wonderful revelation of all, prophet and Jesus found God's dwelling place within the human heart. When man could understand, God could reveal—new meaning in old words.

Similarly, circumcision, tithe, covenant-making, sacrificial system, all took on higher meanings as men entered into the richer and deeper God-experiences. The divine self-revelation passed "from glory unto glory" in the dawning religious consciousness of mankind.

Faith and Reason in Inspiration

The third theory of inspiration harmonizes more readily with faith and reason, experience and education, culture and con-

science. How often the two extremes are witnessed!—those who grope their way by the glimmer of reason on the one hand, and those who rely on the spark of intuition on the other hand. Neither alone is complete. Reason by itself sooner or later runs into a stone wall, and faith alone into the fog. They must not be separated, for they support each other in the guidance of life. One is regulative, the other is rousing.

Modern science has pierced the stone wall, and given reason a view of faith by using the lens of intuition. "There are things," says Bergson, "that intelligence alone is able to seek, but which, by itself, it will never find. These things instinct alone could find, but it will never seek them."[1] Modern theology, on the other hand, is piercing the fog and giving intuition a better use of reason. So that behind wall and fog we may now view a new realm of reality which experience enjoys even when reason is puzzled and faith is misty. Is it not this newly discovered universe of spiritual reality into which William James, George B. Cutten, E. S.

[1] Henri Bergson, Creative Evolution, p. 151.

Ames, I. King, J. H. Leuba, H. C. McComas, J. B. Pratt, E. D. Starbuck, G. Stevens, George A. Coe, and G. M. Stratton, in their psychological treatises of religion, conduct us in a new, fresh, and friendly fashion? Their general standpoint, moreover, seems to be that "the soul is open to invasion from a spiritual universe by which it is surrounded, and that the impressions which it receives from that source are as convincing to those who have them as any direct, sensible experience can be."[2] As Emerson would say, "All minds open into the Infinite mind." It was a fine saying of Professor James, scientifically cautious as he was, when he wrote: "We and God have business with each other; and in opening ourselves to his influence our deepest destiny is fulfilled."[3]

Primacy of Experience in Inspiration

First of all, in dealing with human limitations we need to remind ourselves that in-

[2] J. M. Campbell, Paul the Mystic, p. 143.

[3] William James, The Varieties of Religious Experience, p. 517.

spiration is life at flood-tide, and revelation is lofty experience—experience with the Highest. Life does not begin with logic, but with legs. We do not first have a theory of life and then follow it. We begin to act before we think. Thinking is hard work, and very few people endure the strain. The personal effort is first. We are dowered with certain instincts and tendencies which push us on and on. There is a push in the mold that shoves us out from the shores of eternity. Part of that urge is the spiritual reach which causes us to crane our necks for the starry blue and aspire for the heavenly good. We are dowered with eternity by the Eternal. Faith is a personal trust which instinctively makes us commit our life to the unseen. While we cannot demonstrate God as we do a problem in geometry, yet we can know him. We know God best in fellowship, as we know our parents and love and trust them by being with them. The deepest realities of life are not demonstrated. They are divined. The instinct to do right, acted upon promptly, gives experience in right doing,

and the field of right is enlarged. We know by living and venturing. Life is first faith that my deepest demands—right, love, trust, and good—are real. We surrender to these as worth while and later reason about them to justify them. Hence we know only as we venture. This is not perfect logic, but it is perfect life, or life perfected. God has us in tow for another shore.

Experience, then, is the way of life, the key to the future and the test of reality. God is gained in the venture. Love comes by living, and goodness fattens on honest endeavor. Out of the largest aspirations, heartiest endeavors, and fullest experiences men have found the greatest religious certainties, the fullest inspiration, and the truest knowledge of God. These personal experiences, efforts, and yearnings are channels of inspiration. Godly men, quickened by inspiration, filled with joy, vision, and insight of the unseen realities developing within their hearts, have given us what we call Scripture.

God sends us messages of burning words

through the best and highest of the race. The Hebrew prophets thus ventured upon the unseen, and gained God. God spake, and those nearest and truest to him understood and made known to us of duller ears; and we call them prophets. The "Thus saith the Lord" of the Hebrew prophet was his conscientious conviction which the God of experience had pressed upon his soul. The demands of God were as burning fire in the prophet's bones (Jer. 20. 9); or the call of God was like the roaring of a lion (Amos 3. 8). He saw and heard and knew things of God foreign to the gaping multitude. "Surely the Lord God will do nothing," says Amos (3. 7), "but he revealeth his secret unto his servants the prophets." This is spiritual discernment, insight, foresight, and upsight.

Modern View of God's Inspired Spokesmen

In what sense is such prophetic utterance the word of God? First, in the sense that the prophet himself, as we have seen, is steeped in a God-life. As he is full of

God, he speaks fully of God. As righteousness, mercy, and love are set in his heart, his voice rings with these divine notes. The very name "prophet," *Nabi,* means "a spokesman," or "one bubbling over with the truth," or one speaking the message of another. Both the prophet and the people of the Old Testament believed that the man of God spoke for God (Exod. 4. 16; 1 Sam. 3. 20, 21).

Secondly, it is the word of God in the sense that the prophet is conscious of a divine message. He is sure that he is right, consequently he speaks with authority. He declares the truth as "the Lord put his spirit upon him" (Num. 11. 29; 18. 6). He is a forthteller, rather than a foreteller. He proclaims more than he predicts. He speaks to his own time more than down through the centuries.

Thirdly, the prophetic word is God's word in the sense that it stands the test of experience. The fundamental notes of the prophets are true to life's deepest calls. Their notes accord with our best judgment and largest experience as being sound.

Hence, what they declared, in the main, is universal and necessary to good life. They stand the test of conduct and welfare. That is inspired which inspires; that is true which is binding upon us; that is good which has good results when broadly applied. What they said is authoritative because it is binding. It holds us by appealing to our inner demands.

Prophetic declarations, however, were not necessarily of equal inspirational value. They consisted of grades and shades of utterances. The prophets grasped God's revelations more or less perfectly according to their preparedness to receive them. Isaiah, for instance, could speak of God in history and in the councils of nations because he was experienced in statecraft. Hosea could reveal God as infinite love because he himself loved passionately. Jeremiah could declare the spirituality of religion as independent of temple and priest because he experienced deeply the spiritual life. Isaiah of the captivity would declare suffering for others because he himself suffered the agony of a captive. God reveals

himself most where the human experience is fullest and noblest, because there inspiration is most favorable.

"Four things a man must learn to do
If he would keep his record true:
To think without confusion clearly;
To love his fellow men sincerely;
To act from honest motives purely;
To trust in God and heaven securely."

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CHAPTER III

THE PROPHETS AND THEIR REVELATIONS

GREAT books, like great men, are born. They are not mechanically made. They are living creations, fathered by living men, begotten in the soul of the author. The vitality of a book depends upon the imparted spirit of its author and the loftiness and breadth of its ideas expressed. In this respect the Bible books are supreme. They bear messages of truth to all men. They reveal God who gave himself to the authors in their patient brooding, in their fancies of visions, and in their spiritual devotion.

"In the Royal Art Museum in Berlin there is a picture of Matthew writing his Gospel. He is represented as an old man with a flowing beard, seated at a desk upon which there is a roll. Behind him stands an angel who reaches over his shoulder and

guides his pen. There is a look of intense surprise on Matthew's face, as he sees what his own hand, guided by the angel, has written."[1] This striking picture represents what was once generally believed to have been God's way of revealing himself to men. A few antiques still believe in this mechanical theory. It seems to us now that God must have moved upon the spirit of olden men by his Spirit as he moves each of us at present. Out of that divine impact of Spirit upon spirit "holy men of old were moved," and out of the depths of their own souls drew forth, as living and free men, what they found there. The hand of a wooden Indian will respond to mechanical control, but living men answer to an inner call. The prophets were divine agents and not celestial graphophones.

Divine Discovery in Struggle

Joseph Lee, in his recent readable book on Play in Education, describes a playful kitten that "gave a remarkable series of

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[1] D. A. Hayes, The Synoptic Problem, p. 42.

demonstrations" of how "play trains for life." "A cork was her favorite plaything. . . . She would crouch and lie in wait for it, bat it with her paw, run after it, dodge, jump into the air, . . . and following with a continued somersault and corkscrew movement; . . . always the movement ended with a pounce in which both paws came down on the cork and held it fast."

"What was the kitten doing? Obviously, she was learning her job. You could almost see that cork turn into a mouse as she pursued. She was becoming a cat by doing the things of a cat, . . . and the soft body, from its first helpless moment, was molded by that exercise." The author reflects that "her whole activity was radial,"—that there "was no 'right paw,' 'upward raised!' in her instruction," . . . and that "in the unsentimental, deadly practical school of nature the activity thus prescribed is that by which life is going to be supported. . . . That the purpose had first then taken possession of her soul and was working from that outward, ruling every nerve and muscle from troubled brow to spike of quivering tail.

What possessed her was the passion and ecstasy of pursuit, to which her physical organism conformed as best it could. A kitten playing is a hunting demon, a soul of fire, a spirit that outruns all possible expression. The cat becomes a hunter from the soul out because it is the hunter in her that has built her mind and body from the start."[1]

The reader may wonder why so much space has been taken up in this chapter with the life of a worthless kitten. It is because this narrative points out so well the divine way of all development, human as well as feline. Was it not in the unsentimental, deadly practical school of nature, "the play and the struggle of life, the stress and flutter of the soul," that the prophets gained the secrets of God? The lofty "purpose had first taken possession of his soul and was working from that outward, ruling every nerve and muscle. . . . What possessed him was the passion and ecstasy of pursuit." The prophet is a "soul of fire, a spirit that

[1] Joseph Lee, Play in Education, Chapter III.

outruns all possible expression." The prophet became an agent of special revelation because it was the supernatural in him "that has built mind and body from the start." Whatever is to be evolved must first be involved. In the "deadly practical school" of living intensely from moment to moment and discovering ourselves in the struggle, the activity thus prescribed is that by which life is going to be supported.

The prophets as revealers of God had a divine task. Theirs was the task of establishing religious truth. "The task of revelation is nothing else than to bring religion into existence." How could they reveal God unless he takes hold of the human life? How could ideas of God come without experience of God? The immediate influence of God in the prophet's consciousness gave rise to the prophetic revelations.

Why should this special revelation be the gift of the Hebrew prophets? Historically, it was Israel's gift because she alone of ancient peoples progressed most in religion, took God most seriously, played hardest at the game of life, filled her days to overflow-

ing with pious concerns, and her noblest men, the prophets, registered highest in divine attainments. This is not, however, merely the result of a religious tendency in the race of Israel, as some contend. The special tendency here calls for an added factor—the self-revelation of God in Hebrew history and prophetic consciousness. As the kitten described needed cat instinct, the cork, and human protection to succeed, so the prophet needed his country, its history, its playground, its problems, and its Jehovah to attain his prophetic position as God's revealer.

Naturalness in Revelation

Prophetic revelation sprang from the depths of prophetic conviction, born in the day's work with God for man. The prophets are best understood as real men like ourselves, who attempted to live big, earnest, clean lives as they faced twisted problems and gave their red, human blood to solve them. They must not be set apart entirely from our common human experiences as a totally different order of beings.

Their contact with God was not one different in kind from ours, but perhaps different in degree and purpose. They were, first of all, intensely human. But they were extraordinary men. They thought soberly. They felt deeply. They had stirring convictions. They were flaming preachers of righteousness. They were impassioned reformers, clear-eyed statesmen, and flaming orators. They were not just lonely seers staring into the future, predicting far-off divine events. They spoke and wrote out of living experiences, much as earnest men do now.

Take a striking instance—the prophet Amos, thundering his first message in the ears of guilty Israel. He traveled from Tekoah, his birthplace, south of Jerusalem, where he was a shepherd, to Bethel in the northern kingdom and appeared there at the time of the great yearly feast when the ten northern tribes were gathered to eat and to drink, sacrifice animals, and give thanks to Jehovah for the season's prosperity. While economic and social differences were widening, evils multiplying, and greed con-

suming the nation, the immoral worshipers tried to bribe Jehovah with offerings.

The prophet let loose his belching invective on the unsuspecting revelers at Bethel thus: "The Lord will roar from Zion, and utter his voice from Jerusalem; and the habitations of the shepherds shall mourn, and the top of Carmel shall wither." The prophet did not at once condemn his guilty hearers before him for their sins, but instead began with the sins of the surrounding nations with whom Israel had dealt and disliked—Syria, Philistia, Ammon, Moab, and Edom—whom he bitterly denounced because they had transgressed the universal laws of morality: sins of cruelty, slavery, immorality, and sacrilege. Thus, like a skillful hunter, he circled about his game, slowly closing in upon Israel, and only after the hearers had become attentive and given assent to the moral principle that God hates sin and will punish the guilty did he turn his relentless logic upon the evil hearers before him. "For three transgressions of Israel, and for four, I will not turn away the punishment thereof; because they sold

the righteous for silver, and the poor for a pair of shoes; that pant after the dust of the earth on the head of the poor, . . . for they know not to do right, saith the Lord, who store up violence and robbery in their palaces. . . . Ye who turn judgment to wormwood, and leave off righteousness, . . . and cause the seat of violence to come near; that lie upon beds of ivory, and stretch themselves upon their couches, and eat the lambs out of the flock, and the calves out of the midst of the stall; that chant to the sound of the viol, . . . that drink wine in bowls. . . . Hear this, O ye that swallow up the needy, even to make the poor of the land to fail, . . . falsifying the balances by deceit, that . . . buy the poor for silver, and the needy for a pair of shoes; yea, and sell the refuse of the wheat. . . . The Lord hath sworn by the excellency of Jacob, Surely I will never forget any of their works. Shall not the land tremble for this, and every one mourn that dwelleth therein? . . . And I will turn your feasts into mourning, and all your songs into lamentation" (Amos 1 to 8, extracts).

An Eventful Moment

This was an eventful moment at Bethel in the long, long ago. A soul on fire was pouring forth molten words which burn themselves into humanity. Such words stir men to their diviner depths. Does not speech (in any tongue or time or country thus spoken) seem sacred and carry the mark of the Holy Spirit upon it? It is like a Luther or Wesley moving the multitude. Had David Grayson heard Amos give his social plea at Bethel instead of Bill Hahn, the socialist, at Kilburn, he might have applied to Amos the same descriptive paragraph: "My experience in the world is limited, but I have never heard anything like that speech for sheer power. It was as unruly and powerful and resistless as life itself. It was no mere giving out by the orator of ideas and thoughts and beliefs of his own. It seemed, rather, as though the speaker was looking into the very hearts of that vast gathering of poor men and poor women and merely telling them what they themselves felt, but could not tell. It was

as though they said, 'Yes, yes,' with a feeling of vast relief, 'Yes, yes, at last our own hopes and fears and desires are being uttered —yes, yes.' "[1]

Such flaming faith is generated only in the crucible of hot experience, earnest brooding, and divine contact, whether in by-gone or present days. Life begets life, whether flesh touches flesh or soul touches soul.

> " 'Tis life, whereof our nerves are scant,
> O, life, not death, for which we pant;
> More life, and fuller, that I want."

Scriptural Restriction of Revelation

When one turns to examine the Old Testament it is clear that Holy Writ itself witnesses to several facts as to revelation. A few of these facts may be pointed out in helping us to think of the subject of revelation and in treating the Book which records it. That God has freely and frequently revealed himself to man is a fact taken for granted in the old Testament. Both the early and the late prophetic records testify to this. It is never a matter for dispute.

[1] David Grayson, The Friendly Road, p. 278.

Rather it is a Hebrew certainty. The possession of the spirit of man by the Spirit of God is a scriptural reiteration familiar to all as indicated by such passages as: "Now the Lord had told Samuel" (1 Sam. 9. 15); and, "The prophet that hath a dream, let him tell a dream; and he that hath my word, let him speak my word faithfully" (Jer. 23. 28).

God's unique revelations to man are usually restricted to the spiritual and moral domains. The records of the Old Testament do not witness to a full and free revelation of God upon all kinds of knowledge useful to men. The revelation of which the prophets are conscious is prevailingly a revelation of God's moral character, his moral purpose for man, his workings in history, his love for Israel, his mercy for the sinning, and his age-long plan of human redemption. The restricted revelation was unique in the history of the Hebrew people through its prophets (Jer. 23; Amos 1 to 4; Isa. 1 to 6).

Taking the uniform testimony of the great prophets, are we, to-day, warranted in

holding a theory of revelation which calls for an infallible revelation on all subjects under heaven? Were not scientific, historical, geographical, literary, and all other material facts usually acquired by the sacred writers, as to-day, by finding out the facts in the ordinary human way? Hence some distinction should be made between statements of human limitation and statements of divine revelation, as found in the Bible. In this way errors of dates, names, and places, which modern critics point out in these records, can be accounted for without impairing the essential religious and moral sanction of revelation. A tolerant attitude also may be held toward the critic who has meant no violence to the Book. If it should be found that the sacred writers believed the earth to be flat and stationary, this was their human limitation of knowledge, and need in no way affect their spiritual message of "Thus saith the Lord." The divine truth of universal moral requirements as God's demand upon man is not in the least affected by changing the scientific theory of the earth's shape or mode of travel. One may

have a correct knowledge of God and his demands, and at the same time a wrong view of the solar system. Men might be just as loyal and pleasing to God under the Ptolemaic as under the Copernican theory of the universe. Yet, for all that, we may welcome heartily the corrections which science makes, and turn all to the glory of God. Compare Micah 1. 9 and 3. 12 with Isaiah 36 and 37. The book of Lamentations complains that "Thy prophets have seen vain and foolish things for thee" (2. 14).

Gradualness in Revelation

An appeal to the Old Testament shows, further, that revelation of God's will and way has been gradual, concrete, and historical. It has unfolded bit by bit from age to age. The earlier prophets did not see or grasp God's meanings in the fullness of the later prophets. Between the conceptions of Samuel and Jeremiah there are marked degrees of fullness and clearness. Samuel is found clinging to the sacrificial system (1 Sam. 7. 9), while, five centuries

later, Jeremiah vehemently criticized it (Jer. 7. 22). This is the view of revelation taken by the sacred author of the Epistle to the Hebrews (1. 1, 2). Take the ideas of God, sin, redemption, ethics, social claims, law of retribution, claims of human brotherhood, marriage laws, views of slavery, death, and the future—all gradually clear up and fill out under the long history of the Hebrew people in their matchless schooling by Jehovah. The Holy One of Israel drew very near to his people, and "impressed his divine and eternal personality through the inspired consciousnesses of her great sons, the prophets." But centuries of time were needed to accomplish the result, and the history of the Hebrews constitutes the textbook. The high ethical monotheism of the prophets is the result of the divinely prolonged schooling. While all other ancient peoples said, "God is many and sensuous," Israel was able to say, "God is one, and holy" (Jer. 10. 8-10).

Prophetic Method of Revelation

The method of prophetic revelation

varied greatly. The old Testament shows that God used various ways of making his message known to his servant, the prophet. Samuel found his message in night dreams (1 Sam. 3. 3, 4; Deut. 13. 1-4), while Moses listened to God out of a physical phenomenon (Exod. 3. 2). Both Jacob and Moses are described as meeting God "face to face" (Gen. 32. 30; Exod. 33. 11). In many instances the message is given by an angel (Gen. 16. 7; 22. 1-11; Judg. 6. 11-14). Often the divine will was sought in ecstatic states, as in the case of Balaam (Num. 24. 4; 2 Kings 3. 15). By vision the word of God came most often to the prophets (Isa. 1. 1-6; 6. 1-10; Obad. 1. 1; Nahum 1. 1); by prayer and solitary meditation it came to Habakkuk (2. 1, 2).

It is a noteworthy fact, however, that all other methods except vision virtually ceased to be employed, while vision came to be the common way of receiving God's message by the great prophets from Amos to Jeremiah. Jeremiah in his time almost discredits revelation by means of dreams as a trick of lying prophets (Jer. 23). Now, the Hebrew

words for "vision" and "seer" appear to have come from the same root and to mean something akin to insight or meditation. Hence the great prophets depended for their revelations from God, not upon abnormal states of dreams or ecstasy, but upon direct spiritual enlightenment in a state of normal self-possession. We may conclude, therefore, that God reveals himself in any way that man is able to understand. Obviously, God is manifested most often and clearly in direct experience of the normal soul, which is the divine method we know best to-day. The content of the divine message is quite distinct from the way it was obtained. "It is not how and when it happened, but what happened" that is significant. In Deut. 13. 1-4, we are told that the best of spiritual claims need testing, by noting the nature of the message claimed.

Prophetic Revelation and Biblical Mistakes

To one holding the above attitude, such troublesome passages as "And the Lord hardened the heart of Pharaoh" (Exod. 9.

12), "Samuel hewed Agag in pieces" (1 Sam. 15. 33), and "The evil spirit from God came upon Saul" (1 Sam. 18. 10), present no grave difficulty in their relation to divine revelation. To the alert, modern mind one finds that the question cannot be answered in a narrow, dogmatic fashion and hope to allay the evident unrest. It was once enough to say that there are no errors in the Bible, and that it is the infallible word of God. The new attitude toward all facts taken by the present alert minds calls for a frank, open, and broad treatment of such questions, in keeping with the new forces of our civilization.

If the foregoing considerations be kept in mind, some of the most common and misleading mistakes made in treating the Bible may be avoided, namely:

1. That of judging the entire Bible by a few stray statements like those cited above. This would be like judging an entire box of apples by a few defective ones.

2. That of judging a collective production in the light of its lowest and least representative expressions, rather than its highest

and worthiest. A great singer is rated by her best. The Bible must be rated by its outcome, and not by its beginnings. The measure is not Genesis, but the Gospels; not Cain, but Christ.

3. That of failing to value the Bible, as we value all other writings, in the light of its prevailing and steadily reiterated spirit and aim. The genius and germ of divine revelation was already present, it is plain to see, in early Old Testament faith and life, however dimly and crudely expressed. For, note that these records stand from first to last committed to a way of life which must conform to God's will, and all life is to be interpreted in terms of moral destiny. "Shall not the Judge of all the earth do right?" (Gen. 18. 25), queried Abraham.

Revelation a Divine-Human Partnership

Is prophecy, then, human or divine? It is neither and it is both, as we look at it. As to the inspiring source, it is divine; as to the manner of expressing this God-impulse, it is human. Hence, prophecy is

humanly divine, and divinely human; and the natural in the Bible is as supernatural as the supernatural is natural; that is, without God the Bible could not be; without man it is not likely to have come. God, working in the heart of man, paged it in human experience, man deciphered the handwriting on the walls of his own heart, recorded it in the Bible, and it has become the universal record of inspiration which he who runs may read. The finger of God wrote his revelations on the heart as he daily quickened the prophet's soul. We continue to heed the prophet as the man of God. This view of revelation has been happily expressed in the familiar words of Tennyson, "Speak to him, thou, for he hears." That which God communicates in experience, prophets commit to parchment. The divine flame which burned in the breast of Jeremiah came from the same source as the fire which flames in the bosom of Gipsy Smith. He who gave his word to ancient prophet will not withhold his Spirit from modern preacher. The God who inspired inspires, the Lord who revealed reveals, and the Spirit which in-

dwelt indwells. The God of ancient history is also the God of modern times.

Such a view does not imply new scriptural revelation, but it may make room for fresh revelations of scriptural contents applicable to changing conditions. We do not need a new Bible, nor a new religion. We need a better understanding of the old Bible; a fresh, vitalized way of using it; and a recovery of the spirit manifested in the old religion in order to make the God of the Bible dominant in every human life and in all social relations. If this can best be done by reconstructing methods of religious work, by reinterpreting the Bible meanings, and by remodeling old creeds, well and good. Lord, show us the way, or we perish!

CHAPTER IV

THE PROPHETS AND THEIR MEANING

At present there is a popular craze for Russian novels in this country. Recently the writer of these studies selected and read one of these bearing the empty title The Idiot, written by Dostoevsky. The book contained at least one sentence worth quoting, which may serve, by way of contrast, as a starting point for this chapter: "There is, indeed, nothing more annoying than to be, for instance, wealthy, of good family, nice-looking, fairly intelligent, and even good-natured, and yet to have no talents, no special faculty, no peculiarity even, not one idea of one's own, to be precisely like other people."

The Hebrew prophets are certainly exempt from the charge of being commonplace, dull, or barren of ideas. They were, on the contrary, delightfully fresh, boldly original, and impressively expressive.

Examples of Bible Interpretation

Are you familiar with the book of Jonah? Of course, you are. Since it is best to begin with the familiar, will the reader look in upon this scene? Five different persons on Sunday morning are seated in a room, each with his Bible in his hands, studying the same passage of Scripture, but each using a different *method* of approach to the Word. The book is that of Jonah. Let us observe what meaning each one gets from the passage.

A, who is a literalist, looks upon the book as sober history. Jonah lived and had in detail the experiences narrated. Jonah was a prophet who disobeyed God's command, tried to evade his duty, ran off to sea, was properly disciplined, repented, and finally carried out God's will in sulky fashion. It all really happened just as stated. Wonderful to be sure, but God can do anything, and such miracles only impress his greatness on man. Such questions as the critic raises —for example: Is it likely that God could use with such telling effect a sulky prophet?

Would God send a storm upon the whole sea in order to punish one man? Would God actually use such a form of punishment as keeping a man alive for three days in the fish's belly? Under such circumstances would a man be likely to pray in poetry a psalm of thanksgiving?—do not trouble *A* because, either he will not raise them, or, if they appear, it is enough to say that God is omnipotent and is capable of doing anything he pleases. Miracles are his delight.

B learns by looking up meanings of words that "Jonah" means "dove," "Tarshish" means "sea," "He paid the fare" has a feminine suffix, "her fare," which must mean the ship's fare; therefore, Jonah must have been rich and paid for the ship's lading. "From the presence of the Lord" means "banished from," and "went down into" means "hiding from." Putting his material together, *B* arrives at the fanciful meaning of the passage that a dove, the symbol of a heavenly messenger, finding no responsive soul on earth, fluttered over the restless sea, the symbol of wickedness; and that evil men banished the riches of heaven

into the depths. That is, man spurned God's great offers and cast them beyond his reach.

C looks at the passage from another angle. To him it is not history, but allegory —an allegory of Israel's history. Jonah symbolizes the nation Israel; heathen nations are represented by "sea," "Nineveh," "Babylon"; "storm" stands for God's wrath; "fish" stands for the devouring greed of Assyria; "casting lots" symbolizes Divine Providence. The meaning to *C* is, therefore, clear. Israel, God's prophetic messenger, chosen as the bearer of his truth to the nations, evades this sacred duty; hence, God causes Israel to be swallowed up by Babylon. When duly disciplined he again restores Israel to her native land and through her blesses the world.

D, who is out after proof-texts to support the theory that everything in the Old Testament foreshadows the coming of Christ, sees at once in Jonah "the type of Christ." This he bases on Matt. 12. 40, which reads, "For as Jonas was three days and three nights in the whale's belly; so shall the Son of man be

three days and three nights in the heart of the earth." Hence to *D* this passage is one more trophy in his collection—another bead for his doctrinal necklace—and he strings it on. All else in the book is passed by on the other side.

E, who is after the fundamental truth of the book, sees in Jonah and his experiences the great truth of God that a selfish, exclusive life, whether individual or national, leads to disaster and is hateful to God. Any gift bestowed upon man, God gave for service. He sees that, whether this book be history or parable, the inspired prophet meant to rebuke his people for their refusal to give the heathen world the lofty prophetic religion which they had received. Any worthy gift or knowledge must be shared. The book is primarily a prophetic sermon, calculated to arouse the missionary spirit which was well-nigh dead in Israel at that time. And thus *E* gets meat for his soul and the meaning of the author.

Causes for Interpretative Variations

I am not concerned at this moment, how-

ever, in finding out who is nearest correct in his interpretation, or who is furthest astray; but I am interested in knowing why they have reached such divergent results. For, do not suppose that these are merely imaginary instances. They represent popular methods of getting the meaning from Scripture. They illustrate popular use and abuse of prophecy. Such results are obtained every day in a thousand places. You can find just such things in popular works on prophecy on the shelves of countless homes.

Now, why do such variations exist? It is accounted for chiefly by the method of approaching the Word, and the immediate motive which the reader has in studying a passage. He comes to the Bible primed with a certain point of view which colors its meaning.

When we come to interpret its meaning, variation appears and a variety of results occur in confused profusion. When a person says, "I take the Bible for it," such a statement means merely that, "I interpret it to mean so," nothing more. Now the

"mean so" is generally a personal factor of wanting it so, and wanting it so leans back upon one's acquired religious capital.

A recent able writer makes this significant statement: "If I mistake not, the unrest of the time is less a revolt against the content of traditional beliefs than anxiety of finding some way to be sure of something. The great question is not whether or not such a doctrine is true, but, rather, how we are to distinguish the true from the false." We all desire religious certainty. We do not, however, want to be in such a hurry to be certain that we accept mere opinions for facts, even though these opinions be dogmatically asserted in the name of "Bible exposition." Much that goes under the name of "Bible reading," "Bible study," or "Bible exposition" is merely dogmatic barking and faddist exposure, often ludicrous and sometimes indecent; not contained in Scripture, but extorted from it.

That most of the interpreters are honest does not materially change the result. An honest error of fact has the same result as any other error. Mistaking a toadstool for

a mushroom does not ease digestion, for all that the eater is honestly mistaken. This applies to Scripture interpretation as well as to toadstools—and with the same result.

But what has all this to do with prophecy? It has everything to do with prophecy. For we cannot intelligently and safely talk about prophecy without first paying some heed to the methods and principles of interpretation. No doubt, it will be said that the author's interpretation, like all the rest, is merely his "mean so," and, therefore, no better than the others' "mean so." How, then, is one to judge which is correct? Well, that depends upon who is getting the closest to prophetic facts and who is using the most trustworthy method of getting the meaning out of the Word, assuming that all are equally moved by the spirit of honesty.

Prevalent Methods of Interpretation

Prophecy, like other portions of Scripture, means what we declare it to mean as a result of the general view we hold of religious values, and the popular method of

Scripture interpretation applied. These may be suggestively termed:

1. The Block Method, literal and artificial.

2. The Circus Method, raising false issues.

3. The Looking-glass Method, allegorical treatment.

4. The Curio Method, collecting texts to support views.

5. The Common-sense Method, historical and balanced.

The first treats the Bible in block fashion, as literal history and sober fact from cover to cover, and makes it all of equal value and meaning. This makes the Bible wooden and artificial and often leads to hypocrisy. There is, of course, history and sober fact, but there is much else also. The second is like a circus, showy and spectacular, but foolish and unreal. It puts a little knowledge to sensational use. The third is the method of finding nothing historical or actual, but treating everything as allegorical and didactic, so that all parts have some other meaning than their plain statements.

The fourth, or curio method, is perhaps the one most used and abused. It is most convenient for bolstering up all "isms" and false doctrines saddled upon an innocent but yearning public. By indiscriminate collections of passages for the purpose of proving a proposition, any fad view whatever can be supported. Polygamy, suicide, drunkenness, sorcery, all have been substantiated by Scripture quotations. It says in one place, "Judas went and hanged himself," in another, "Go thou and do likewise." The man who was converted at camp meeting justified himself in still using tobacco by quoting, "He that is filthy, let him be filthy still" (Rev. 22. 11). Obviously, such methods must be used with caution, or the Scriptures are easily perverted.

Principles of Corrective Interpretation

The five students cited, getting the meaning from the prophecy of the book of Jonah, illustrate, respectively, the five popular methods in vogue. They cannot all be correct. All have drawn upon the same identi-

cal portion of Scripture, and yet each has found a different meaning in what he read.

How, then, is the unskilled but earnest Bible reader to obtain the right meaning from his Bible?

First, in the main, all that is essential to life and salvation is sun-clear to anyone of average sense and ability to read. No one has any trouble in grasping such meanings as these: "Hate the evil, and love the good, and establish judgment in the gate" (Amos 5. 15); "Sow to yourselves in righteousness, reap in mercy; break up your fallow ground; for it is time to seek the Lord" (Hos. 10. 12); "Wash you, make you clean; put away the evil of your doings from before mine eyes; cease to do evil; learn to do well; seek judgment, relieve the oppressed, judge the fatherless, plead for the widow" (Isa. 1. 16-17). There is no mistaking the meaning in such passages. The wayfaring man need not err therein. The trouble in such cases is not mental, but moral.

Secondly, there are many things, as Peter said about Paul's writings, "hard to be understood" (2 Pet. 3. 16). How shall the

correct meaning of these be obtained? There are a few valuable principles which everyone should heed if he is anxious to get at the truth of the more difficult portions of Scripture.

1. There should be a strict observance of scriptural facts. A single statement must not be so interpreted as to give a wrong estimate of a large group of facts and thus misinterpret the prevailing trend of the passage under consideration. Take as an instance Exod. 7. 3 and 8. 15. In one case God is said to "harden Pharaoh's heart" and in the other he (Pharaoh) "hardened his heart." Now, in view of all that is taught by the prophets in the Old Testament regarding the nature of God, and by Christ in the New, the second statement expresses the right estimate; for God is of "purer eyes than to behold evil, and canst not look on iniquity" (Hab. 1. 13).

2. The author must be permitted to tell his own story, and not be forced to express the reader's bias. Too often men have hearty theories about the Bible, and then try to make the Bible support them. We should

recognize the writer's view, whether we like it or not, and not try to twist it to fit our own view. This may be illustrated by the book of Genesis. How often it has been insisted that the aim of this book was to write history, or science, or philosophy! When carefully studied the aim is seen to be the preacher's. This prophet-author has a text, and uses history, science, and story to enforce the intended spiritual lesson; namely, that God cares for them that care for him, and will keep and reward the faithful and punish the recreant. All else supports this contention.

3. It is needful to take note of literary differences, styles, and forms of expression used in the Bible in the light of the age to which they belong. The interpretation of a passage is sometimes sharply affected by an oversight of so simple a thing as prose or poetry. In the tenth chapter of Joshua, which describes the historical event of a great battle won before sunset, a bit of poetry is inserted thus: "Sun, stand thou still upon Gibeon! and thou moon in the valley of Ajalon!" This poetic stanza has been

treated by many as prose-fact, and pronounced a stupendous miracle of an actual suspension of the sun's movements for hours. When it is seen that it is a bit of poetry taken from the "Book of Jasher" (Josh. 10. 13), it may be interpreted as we interpret the 114th psalm which describes the mountains skipping like rams, and the little hills like lambs.

The latter being a sacred poem to an earthquake, found in the midst of a book of poetry, no one has even thought of regarding it as a miracle. Here poetic license is accepted. Many, therefore, prefer to regard this battle-poem in like manner. The question with them is not whether miracles are possible, for they find them in the Bible. It is often a matter of literary form which decides the meaning of a passage. God reveals his truth in poetry as well as in prose. Our God must not be thought so prosaic as not to delight in poetry. Nearly one third of the Old Testament is in verse.

4. To get the right meaning one should allow for human limitations in grasping and representing God's eternal truths. Even

prophets and inspired biblical writers at times "see through a glass, darkly; but then face to face: now I know in part" (1 Cor. 13. 12). Wherever we come upon a statement which seems to present God as making demands unworthy the Great Teacher of the New Testament, we do well to regard it as man's, and not as God's limitation, and that we have to do with an imperfect stage of revelation which a later stage completes. Unless it is regarded as human shortcoming, it seems to many that it would be an interpretation which presents a blemished God or a twisted morality.

An observation of these simple laws of interpretation will greatly aid anyone in finding the true meaning of most passages, and will avoid a variety of results to which the first four methods cited are liable. On account of a lack of space they can only be mentioned. These methods distort the real meaning of the Word; they have the effect of devitalizing the Scriptures; they make for dogmatism and bigotry, fertilize freak sects, and fill many plain, hard-headed people with a skeptical attitude toward the Bible.

The fifth method mentioned is the only safe and sane method of approach which alone will yield correct results. Try it and see. That which you interpret the Bible to mean is the Bible which you respect and love. When we have done all, some meanings will remain obscure. Even these we may hope to know when we shall see "face to face" (1 Cor. 13. 12). Meanwhile let us follow the best guides and walk by their interpretative light. Since God alone can match our spiritual craving, we have need to go in quest of the Bible which contains the supreme expression of man's supreme experience. There we may catch the murmur from the shores of the eternal deep to fill our common days with speech of God.

"So let the way wind up the hill or down,
Though rough or smooth, the journey will be joy;
Still seeking what I sought when but a boy.
New friendship, high adventure, and a crown.
I shall grow old, but never lose life's zest,
Because the road's last turn will be best."

CHAPTER V

THE PROPHETS AND THEIR AUTHORITY

"Oh David, David. Don't be angry with poor little Vera if she doubts—if she wants to feel quite sure. You see, I was brought up in the Greek church." This plea of Miss Revendal's, in the play called The Melting Pot, is in a way a universal modern confession of faith; and the answer of David, the hero of the play, is worthy of the Hebrew prophets: "It is live things, not dead metals, that are being melted in the crucible. The ideas of the fathers shall not be fastened on the children. Each generation must live and die for its own dream. . . . Yes—by faith in the crucible. From the blood of battlefields spring daisies and buttercups. In the divine chemistry the very garbage turns to roses."

There is truly an eager and universal quest for certainty. With open eyes and ears we look and listen for tokens of assur-

ance. Can we know for a certainty that that which we believe as right and good is the very truth of God? How we crave authority over life! That is why we cling so stubbornly to blind tradition and look with discredit on new ideas. No, we must not be angry with poor little doubting Veras. They have been "brought up" to believe as they do, and then came the big world and doubt. "It is the fires of God round his crucible," to continue David's words. "Can you hear the roaring and bubbling? How the great Chemist melts and fuses them all!" This voices, in the main, the modern religious situation of the mass of people about us. They say little about it, but are much troubled over their slipping faith which they yearn to retain. If they could only be sure of themselves! How could the ancient prophets be so confident of moral truth? Can we find in them the key to certainty for ourselves?

Prophetic Certainty

The noticeable characteristic of the Hebrew prophets is their unshaken conviction.

They knew they were right. They never wavered. Therefore they were men who spoke with fiery zeal. They declared their message with authority, and always referred to their message as coming to them from God (Jer. 2. 1). They appeared to be possessed by the words they spoke. Hence their literary formula runs, "Thus saith the Lord," or "Jehovah of hosts hath spoken it" (Isa. 17. 6; Ezek. 34. 1; 37. 5; Amos 1. 9). They had the sense of a direct communication, so vivid and detailed that they interpreted it as the very voice of God. Therefore, the prophet was "a voice and not an echo, a dynamic power and not an effect, a living person and not a shadow." This conviction of the prophet that God spoke to him and through him, or in some manner conveyed his revelation to him, meets the Bible reader continually. This need not, however, be taken in an over-literal sense, that God always spoke in audible words as one man speaks to another; but only that the Spirit of God wrought the conviction in the prophet's soul so that he felt a divine certainty about the message he uttered. An

inner certainty, however it came, was just as convincing as would have been a voice from the sky. The preacher who is called of God for the ministry does not hear a voice like a man speaking to him, but he is no less certain of his call. God has subtler ways of tucking the fact into the soul. The fact and source of the divine certainty is the all-important matter; the manner of receiving it is indifferent. The knowledge the prophets had of spiritual things was immediate and conclusive. The conviction of a divine sense in the soul, however, has never been of itself the sole guarantee of the value and truth of the message spoken. The message must also be tested by its worth (Deut. 13. 1-4). Nevertheless, this sense gave the prophet intensity and his words fire to kindle the hearts of his hearers. The authority of that which they uttered rested upon their intrinsic worth for life.

Here lies a fact of vital moment, whether for the ancient prophet of Israel or for the modern preacher of America. Each must speak with authority to be convincing. Each must have intense conviction of the source,

the truth, and the authority of that which he declares. The world in every age will listen to such prophets in reverent silence. This is, no doubt, what Saint Augustine meant in saying, "My body lives by my soul."

The Prophetic Credential

The Hebrew word for prophet, *Nabi,* reflects the conception, a spokesman for Deity whose message he carries and delivers. Aaron was appointed as *Nabi* for Moses to speak God's word in Moses' stead (Exod. 4. 16). Moses himself was regarded as a prophet who received and announced God's communication in the public assembly of Israel (Deut. 18. 15-18), and he was promised that such a spokesman-prophet should never be wanting to faithful Israel. This line of prophetic successors appeared in every century of Israel's eventful history. The belief that God makes his will known to his people through chosen spokesmen was so commonplace in Israel that the wise sage coined it into a proverb, "Where there is no vision, the people perish" (Prov. 29. 18).

Men "shall run to and fro to seek the word of the Lord," said Amos, "and shall not find it" (8. 12). So sure was Amos in regard to God revealing his will to the prophet that he challenged Israel in these significant words: "Surely the Lord will do nothing, but he revealeth his secret unto his servants the prophets" (Amos 3. 7). Hosea phrased it, "Come, and let us return unto the Lord" (6. 1). The princely Isaiah pleaded with the people, "Come now, and let us reason together, saith the Lord: . . . for the mouth of the Lord hath spoken it" (1. 18, 20). The intensive Jeremiah said, "His word was in mine heart as a burning fire shut up in my bones, and I was weary with forbearing, and I could not stay" (Jer. 20. 9). The priest-prophet Ezekiel, being a literary man, wrote, "And he said unto me, Son of man, stand upon thy feet, and I will speak unto thee. . . . Eat this roll [book] and go speak unto the house of Israel" (Ezek. 2. 1, 3. 1).

Prophetic Conviction

This, then, was the prophet's credential

that he believed the message to have been laid upon him by Jehovah himself. It was this fact that gave him a high place and great authority in Israel. Kings and princes, priests and people alike, sought the prophet because they believed him to be a spokesman for God. That is to say, the prophets of Israel, the people of Israel, and the rulers of Israel, all believed that to speak God's will one must be inspired of God. Now, what did they mean by being inspired? They seem to have meant, for one thing, being "filled with the Spirit," which Paul said was "the will of the Lord" (Eph. 5. 17-18). This is what the prophet Ezekiel clearly tells us in describing his own call to the prophetic mission. "And the Spirit entered into me when he spake unto me, and set me upon my feet, that I heard him that spake unto me" (Ezek. 2. 2). A late prophet, Joel, predicts that, "It shall come to pass afterward, that I will pour out my Spirit upon all flesh; and your sons and your daughters shall prophesy" (2. 28). In fact, a display of any personal quality, such as skill, bravery, strength, or wisdom, in an un-

usual manner, was attributed directly to the gift of God's Spirit. The Hebrew mind never counted secondary causes as we do, but went directly to the Divine Source for everything. Solomon received his wisdom (1 Kings 3. 12), David his courage (1 Sam. 17. 45), Samson his physical strength (Judg. 16. 20), and Samuel his insight (1 Sam. 3. 19), directly through the indwelling of God. The Hebrews believed that all exceptional persons were miraculously endowed with their talents, just as were the prophets. To quote again from Zangwill's Melting Pot, David, the enthusiastic musician, when rebuked by Mandel thus, "But you needn't get so excited about it," replied, "Not when one hears the roaring of the fires of God?" Have they not all stood by the same kindling flame?

To-day when the spirit of man is touched by this same Spirit of the living God, and raised to a greater intensity, we explain the phenomenon by secondary causes, as awakened intuition, genius, consecrated powers, awakening, or training. Our present love for natural explanations betrays us into tak-

ing this round-about way to explain the revelations of God within us. That is to say, we prefer to recognize God's power as inherent in us and manifesting itself through natural channels. In any event, the living God is the final source of human power. He who inwardly feels God most, and who thinks most about God, will likely know most of God; and he who lives most conscientiously and intimately with God will likely have the fullest sense of being his representative. The spiritually minded see God and discern things which other people only dimly surmise. "The prophets are above all things impassioned seers of spiritual truth and preachers of religion," says Dr. Sanday. Is it not the realization of truth that constitutes for any of us genuine revelation? Nothing can be vital to us until our own minds grasp it as a new reality. Then it lives; then it warms; then it moves to action. Is it not this same Spirit of God working in us which forms the truth of Scripture now? Otherwise, would not the Bible be a meaningless book? Where there are Spirit-filled prophets speaking there

must be, in a less degree, Spirit-filled hearers receiving (Psa. 44. 1).

Wherever truth is thus born in man, it brings to him the sense of divine authority, for all real truth is divine, and consequently from God, the only source. He who discovers it is a prophet whose burden it is to declare the same. Being convinced that he is in possession of the genuinely true, he speaks with a prophet's assurance in whatever field of God's great realm he may be at work.

Prophetic Means of Infilling

The prophetic records show that the Divine Spirit used various means of obtaining recognition in the life of the prophets. Sometimes it was by means of entrancing music (Saul), dreams (Joseph), ecstasy (Balaam), an angel of the Lord (Daniel), prolonged meditation (Habakkuk), some historic crisis (Isaiah), or by direct request (Elisha). It was of little consequence whether the divine manifestation came by means of dream, vision, angel, or ecstatic trance; it was all equally real to the prophet,

and equally direct from God. He did not analyze, as we do, his thoughts, feelings, and convictions, and label them as "psychological occurrences" stimulated by a "directive environment." He traced every event directly to Jehovah. What we call personal convictions were to him "Thus saith the Lord." In either case, in the last analysis, it is the pressure of God in the life taking active form. "For it is God which worketh in you both to will and to do of his good pleasure" (Phil. 2. 13). It is well to remember, however, that in the case of the great prophets, *vision* is the usual mode of divine illumination (Prov. 29. 18; Jer. 23. 25; Isa. 6. 1-6).

Prophetic Test of Accuracy

What shall be the test of accuracy for us to-day? The ancient prophet and his people may regard "the man of God" divinely inspired and possessed of knowledge which others did not have. But how may we now know that these prophetic records in the Old Testament truly represent the mind of God? Such questions are the more difficult

since a perusal of prophetic declarations reveals the fact that contemporaneous prophets sometimes contradicted each other, while both used the same sacred formula to enforce their words, "Thus saith the Lord."

A clear example of this is the controversy of the prophet Micaiah with the prophets of Ahab in connection with the king's war policy. One prophet predicted failure; the others in a body predicted success (1 Kings 22). Another conspicuous instance is the conflict between the prophet Jeremiah and Hananiah, whose messages are adverse to each other (Jer. 28). Yet, each prophet declared boldly in the temple, before the assembled multitude, "Thus saith the Lord," to insure his hearers that his message was from God. Other instances might be related. In these accounts it is evident that the ancient hearers were puzzled to know, at the moment, which prophet conveyed the mind of God. Both, of course, could not be correct, since they opposed each other. It is true that we to-day know them apart as the true and the false prophets. But who was to tell Ahab, the king at the

time, who was God's real prophet? How, then, was the matter decided?

The Scriptural Formula for Testing Truth

That age, as does this, fell back upon the practical test of accuracy and soundness—Does the message accord with fact and truth? That is the ever-ready test of authority, and those who fail in meeting it are branded as lying prophets, even though their claims be lofty, and they manifest supernatural ability. False prophets, no less than the true, claimed divine inspiration, and miracles were even attributed to them (1 Kings 13; Deut. 3. 1-3). Several tests of authority are offered in the prophetic writings. The first is found in Deut. 13. 1-4, and reads as follows: "If there arise among you a prophet, or a dreamer of dreams, and giveth thee a sign or a wonder, and the sign or the wonder come to pass, whereof he spake unto thee, saying, Let us go after other gods, which thou hast not known, and let us serve them; Thou shalt not hearken unto the words of that prophet, or that

dreamer of dreams: for the Lord your God proveth you, to know whether ye love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul. Ye shall walk after the Lord your God, and fear him, and keep his commandments, and obey his voice, and ye shall serve him, and cleave unto him."

Three conditions are here required of the prophet: (1) that his message should conform to well-known standards of ethics and religion; (2) that his claims shall be backed by a genuinely sound and good life; (3) that that which he predicts shall come to pass. That is, no one can truly represent God who contradicts good common sense, well-tested experience, the facts of nature, and ethical demands. Prophets like Amos, Isaiah, and Jeremiah met these tests. Two other similar tests are offered (Deut. 18. 15-22; Jer. 28), in which the appeal is made to past history and future outcome.

In the instance noted it is plain that the Hebrews of old had some difficulty in making sure which prophet spake the mind of God when their messages were at variance with each other. They, as we, seem to have

lacked a ready-made infallible test. It is evident that the prophetic hearers had to use their own God-given intuition and acquired knowledge in the discrimination of truth and error on which we are obliged to rest. Truth usually carries the day by its own inherent worth when lodged in human life. The prophets, moreover, seem to have possessed no lost art by which they could enforce truth spoken. Like modern men of God, the ancient prophets relied upon appeals to human intelligence, religious needs, social worth, and ancient good to drive home the truth uttered. In their time, truth, as it is in our day, was self-attesting and experientially vindicated. Believing that the God who voiced himself in prophecy would no less find his way into the hearts of the hearers, the prophets trusted the "word of the Lord" to move the men of Israel as it had first moved them.

Modern Test of Authority

The ability to demonstrate that the prophet is endowed with the power of God is confirmed by prophetic records. We read

in 1 Sam. 3. 20, "All Israel from Dan even to Beer-sheba knew that Samuel was established to be a prophet of the Lord." In verse 19 we are told how Israel knew this. "The Lord was with him, and did let none of his words fall to the ground." The meaning of this seems to be that Samuel proved his loyalty to God's will by the fruit of his life and work. Furthermore, it seems that the early prophets—Moses, Elijah, and Elisha—relied, to some extent, upon the ability to perform miracles (1 Kings 18. 24) as a test of their authority to speak for God. The later prophets, however, do not rely upon wonder-works to enforce their claims of divine authority. Amos, Isaiah, Hosea, Jeremiah, and Ezekiel rarely perform miracles (Isa. 20). In Jeremiah's time there is warning against accepting signs and wonders as proof that one speaks God's word (Deut. 13. 2-4). Here two significant tests are suggested: (1) Is the word which is spoken true to experience in that it makes for human well-being? (2) Is the speaker manifesting good will, that is, the will to be good and to do good? Truth and goodness,

then, are the fundamental tests of the man of God, ancient or modern. There is no higher test of authority than conformity to truth. And there is that instinctive element of truth in every man's heart which will answer to the truth in the author's heart.

How shall we be able to distinguish the permanent and genuine in prophecy from the passing and superficial? We possess the innate test of our divine nature which, like a sixth sense, weathers the approaching gale. How often it is said that if any portion of the Bible is admitted to be untrustworthy, none of it is dependable. Such reasoning is poor logic, worse practice, and bad religion. We neither argue thus nor act so in practical concerns of life.

A counterfeit dollar does not invalidate all money. There are ways of testing the genuine in every line; no less in religion than in rubles. The prophets made their appeal to the Hebrew conscience in reply to false prophets whose messages failed to conform to well-known moral standards and long since accepted revelations of God (Jer. 14. 13-22). To some this seems too uncertain.

Authority must be definite. We naturally like to feel secure in a doctrine of prophecy which admits of no flaw. The doctrine of the inerrancy of the Bible would be comforting if only it were manageable. Professor Borden P. Bowne has summarized the matter in this terse manner:

"If the doctrine [inerrancy of the Bible] is important, we are in a bad way, because we have no inerrant Bible at present. If we grant the doctrine, we can make nothing of it, and we are as badly off with it as without it." The prophetic records make no infallible claim for themselves, nor does life call for such a record. But life discovers in them something that is infinitely better, inspired and inspiring personalities; for instance, the grimly righteous Amos, the effectively pleading Hosea, the eloquently hopeful Isaiah. Catching the spirit of such men, even now, across the gap of time, fires the soul of modern man, casts a divine spell over his heart, and fills him with the prophetic ardor. This is the best of authority, the authority of God's presence in life being realized day by day, and ringing true to the

rock-bottom facts of life. Whatever ministers blessings to man, furthers his normal well-being, and stands the test of time, cannot be far wrong. It must be of God, even though its form and application change from age to age.

Thus Whittier must have thought when he wrote:

"I looked: aside the dust-cloud rolled—
The waster seemed the builder too;
Upspringing from the ruined old
I saw the new.

"Take heart! the waster builds again—
A charmed life old goodness hath;
The tares may perish—but the grain
Is not for death."

CHAPTER VI

THE PROPHETS AND THEIR PERSONALITY

JOHN RUSKIN's message, reiterated in a thousand ways, which he held up before the last generation, runs thus: "Goodness is more than gold, and character outweighs intellect." Personality is God's greatest achievement for man since it conditions all genuine worth. The Old Testament literature bears the impress of various types of personality. To anyone who reads the Old Testament it will appear that God used at least four distinct types of persons to produce its books. Any book or chapter which may be read is the product of one of the following classes of persons: the priest, the philosopher (wise man), the poet, and the prophet. These represent, on the whole, persons of temperamental differences, life-long divergence in training, interests, and associations. They represent also different functions in Hebrew life. Hence it may be

said that God used the four P's to give us the Old Testament Scriptures—

Priest
Philosopher
Poet
Prophet.

"For the law shall not perish from the priest, nor counsel from the wise, nor the word from the prophet" (Jer. 18. 18).

The Hebrew Priest

The priest, under God, was the custodian of law and worship. His interest was (1) in the temple, its altars, sacrifices, offerings, feasts, fasts, and rites; (2) in the formation, preservation, and administration of law and custom. His services were indispensable to Hebrew society. From birth to death the priest's hand touched every practical interest of Hebrew life. Hence, priestly writings were short and choppy, prosaic and legal. The seldom read book of Leviticus is the best example of his style of writing. It might be said of Leviticus, as the Irishman said of the dictionary, "It is interesting reading, but it changes subject so often."

The Hebrew Sage

The philosopher, called by Israel "the wise man" (Prov. 1. 5; 13. 20), was the custodian of the people's thought life. God used these quiet thinkers to guide the common people's outlook upon life as a whole. The wise men usually sat in the market place by the gate of ancient walled cities where people congregated (Prov. 31. 23) and where they could be consulted on matters vital to life's meaning. There they were plied with such questions as: "What is right and good for me?" "What is my duty?" "From whence did all things come?" (Book of Proverbs.) "What kind of woman would be an ideal wife?" (Proverbs 31.) "What is the highest good in life?" (Ecclesiastes.) "Upon what basis does the good God rule the world, seeing that the undeserving often suffer?" (Job.) In daily life the wise men's counsel was, "Practice moderation in all things."

The Hebrew Poet

The poet's function was to minister chiefly to the emotions. He touched the springs of

feeling and guided them to God, as the wise man did the intellect. His poetry begins with God, continues with God, and ends with God; whether the occasion be that of a starlit night (Psa. 8) or a golden sunrise (Psa. 19), a furious storm (Psa. 29) or a frightful earthquake (Psa. 114), the homesickness of the captive (Psa. 137) or a sense of pastoral security (Psa. 23). The book of Psalms, therefore, became Israel's songbook in the worship of the temple. On feast days and Sabbaths, pilgrimages and conquests, the people expressed their divine emotions by means of song (Pilgrim Song, Psa. 126, Dedication Song, Psa. 118).

The Hebrew Prophet

The prophet, under God, was Israel's custodian of the revelation of Jehovah. To him were intrusted the oracles. He was a preacher of righteousness; a seer who saw clearly. He declared the message which stirred to moral action. The prophet, therefore, represented a unique personality which combined insight, foresight, inspiration, and

action. He stood as Israel's gifted spokesman for Jehovah (Amos 3. 8).

Since the prophet's teachings were the outgrowth of his personality, let us consider for a moment the individual traits of the prophets. Their personalities vary greatly from each other. The prophets differed in looks, manners, temperaments, education, and methods much as do ministers of our time. They were markedly, even radically unlike.

The Relentless Amos

Nathan was brusque (2 Sam. 12); Gad was pliable (2 Sam. 24. 11-14); Samuel was gentle and excitable (1 Sam. 8. 1-15; 15. 8-33); Elijah was dramatic and rash (1 Kings 18. 40; 19. 4); Elisha was dignified and diplomatic (2 Kings 4. 38-44; 9. 1-11). The writing prophets, as they are styled, have left us more material from which to judge, so that we are able to form a clearer estimate of their personalities. Amos, the shepherd prophet from the Tekoan hills, reared among crags and crannies, living in desert and dell, facing wild beasts and wily

men, distilled these fierce elements into his character. Hence he was a man of rugged strength, and liquid iron flowed in his veins. As a prophet he was severe, relentless, and uncompromising. Even the age in which he lived (B. C. 760) was marked by severity. He was a John Calvin of his day and knew no compromise. With him it was as with Calvin—doom or discipline. He must have "roared" his message like a "roaring lion," for he opened his first sermon with, "The Lord will roar from Zion, . . . and the top of Carmel shall wither" (1. 2). Thus by character he was God's ready scourge to Israel. He proclaimed the then much-needed message of the God of stern righteousness, whose very innermost nature he pictured as justice and law. Although there was not a soft touch in Amos's make-up, Israel had need of this fire-eating prophet.

The Lovelorn Hosea

Hosea, his companion prophet of the north, was totally unlike Amos. He had been disciplined in the school of desperate love and bitter disappointment. Therefore,

his eloquence was "logic set on fire." Early in his life he fell in love with a coquettish, vivacious girl, called Gomer, whom he married. For a time they were apparently very happy together, but at length another stole his wife's affection and became father to the third child. When the shameful secret leaked out, the guilty pair eloped (Hos. 1-2). The prophet's heart was torn and bleeding. He still loved his fickle and unfaithful wife, and at length sought her and brought her back from her degrading slavery (3. 2). The whole tenor of his writing reveals a man of affectionate nature, shy and shrinking disposition, indulgent tenderness, and flaming emotions. Out of a broken heart Hosea pleaded with Israel to be faithful to her husband, Jehovah, who loved her tenderly (6-7). Having experienced the pangs of a broken heart by the wayward conduct of his wife, there burst upon him the profound significance of the love-relation existing between Jehovah and Israel. Hence this love-prophet was best fitted to convey to man the love of God. To him the cardinal trait of Jehovah was affection.

Love had been the deepest note in his own life. Could it well be otherwise with God? Accordingly, to him the meanest of all sins was unrequited love. After all, is not lovelessness the blackest of all sins whether between man and man or God and man? Not to love is not to live. As a present writer has expressed it in his book entitled, What Men Live By, "Real life, then, if it is to mean the nourishing, sustaining, and developing of existence, demands work, play, and love."[1]

The Brilliant Isaiah

The most striking, brilliant, and versatile of all the prophets was the princely Isaiah, the son of Amoz. He was highly gifted by birthright and training. His was the bestowment of a large mold and rich surroundings. He seems even to have had royal blood coursing in his veins, and to have moved all of his life in the cultured circles of Hebrew society. He must have received a finished education, for his manner, speech,

[1] Richard C. Cabot, What Men Live By, p. xv.

and bearing show him to have been cultured to the very fingertips. We may picture the average prophet as crude and crusty, rude and rugged, with shaggy eyebrows and long hair, horny hands and weather-beaten visage; which would be a fairly accurate description of most of them. The brilliant Isaiah, however, was not such an one. He would have resembled in appearance, manner, and speech one of our modern, refined city preachers, always neatly groomed.

Jehovah had been lavish with this favorite son of Jerusalem, whom he had cradled in wealth and reared in the lap of luxury. None had been endowed with greater versatility than he. Isaiah manifested brilliant gifts in many directions, any one of which would entitle him to recognition and mark him as a man of distinction. Isaiah was preacher and reformer, poet and painter, composer and singer, statesman and orator, educator and instigator, dramatist and strategist. He was likewise brilliant and persistent, intense and sustained, lofty and daring, graceful and diplomatic. It is hardly too extravagant to say that Isaiah

possessed the best gifts of all the other prophets: the faith of Abraham, the leadership of Moses, the dash of Joshua, the boldness of Nathan, the popularity of David, the wisdom of Solomon, the severity of Amos, the passion of Hosea, the spirituality of Jeremiah, the resourcefulness of Ezekiel, the statesmanship of Nehemiah, the vision of Daniel, and the irony of Jonah.

Above all else Isaiah was Israel's most gifted orator and polished preacher. Never before had any voice plied so well the Hebrew speech as his. He was to Jerusalem what Savonarola was to Florence, what Luther was to Germany or Wesley to England. From his eloquent lips poured forth the speech of Canaan like water from a fountain. His sentences are saturated with a wealth of metaphors, a profusion of figures, a richness of graceful phrases, and a range of vocabulary which bewilders, aye, even at times paralyzes his hearers. Read, for instance, the first six chapters of his book and feel, even through the English translation, the power, grace, and beauty of his matchless speech.

Who can ever shake the spell of Isaiah, once he has come under his magic words? Every Bible lover will recall at once the sixth chapter of Isaiah, one of the loftiest in the Old Testament. "I saw also the Lord sitting upon a throne, high and lifted up, and his train filled the temple. . . . Then said I, Woe is me! for I am undone; because I am a man of unclean lips, and I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips: for mine eyes have seen the King, the Lord of hosts." He takes one into the very presence of the living God where no evil can abide. The charm of his spirit abides. The reputation of Ulysses at the court of Troy, "No mortal then would dare to strive with him for mastery in speech," applies to the gifted Isaiah.

The Tragic Jeremiah

In Jeremiah we reach the summit of prophetic greatness and power. Notwithstanding his gifted and brilliant personality, Isaiah did not possess the iron logic of Amos, the originality of Micah, or the keen

insight of Jeremiah. Never again, until in Christ, did prophecy reach his level. The torrential Isaiah did not leave much original work. He mainly borrowed from others and cast their thoughts into new expressions in his own liquid style of utterance. Jeremiah, on the other hand, though less flowing and less prosaic than Isaiah, was far more original and spiritual, blunt and precise. Jeremiah was as passionate as Hosea and as logical as Amos. His solitary figure towers over his time like a colossus, too great to be appreciated by men of his age. A strange and turbulent nature was his. He experienced the painful loneliness of genius. He was often torn between conflicting emotions of duty and seclusion, taste and obligation, ambition to preach the word and a sensitiveness to criticism. "Oh that my head were waters," he would bitterly cry out, "and mine eyes a fountain of tears, that I might weep day and night for the slain of the daughter of my people! Oh that I had in the wilderness a lodging place of wayfaring men; that I might leave my people, and go from them!" (9. 1-2.)

Jeremiah was by nature affectionate and tender as a woman and, therefore, shrank from the prophetic task of playing the role of muckraker. Yet, he never left his post nor ceased his preaching. He clung to his duty with grim desperation; never letting go, though he pined for quietude. Duty and divine command were to this man more imperative than natural taste and personal inclination. Because he had a keen mind and a tender heart, depth of feeling and breadth of mind, his was a life at once heroic and pathetic, dramatic and tragic (see 10. 19; 8. 18-21; 18. 19-23; 20. 14). He lived a life of perpetual martyrdom for the cause of Jehovah, although he preferred the scholar's seclusion.

His personal sufferings at the hands of his countrymen were greater than those of any other prophet, for Jeremiah lived in a turbulent age when boundaries of empires were shifting and the whole Eastern world was in volcanic eruption from the Euphrates to the Nile. Little Judah was situated in the very center of the international crater. Thus, this prophet's life imbibed the turmoil

of his age. He too became at times turbulent. In turn, he would scold, plead, threaten his people; then he would as suddenly talk with God and make excuses for them; curse his own life; meekly repent; boldly stiffen up, face his persecutors with "As for me, behold, I am in your hand: do unto me as seemeth good and meet unto you," when his life was threatened (26. 14). Nevertheless, with all his puzzling contradictions, Jeremiah was always grand, creative, and courageous (31. 16-19).

He it is, therefore, who is best fitted to give the highest and fullest revelation of God which is to be found in the Old Testament. Jeremiah (1) spiritualized God (10. 8-16); (2) purified worship (7. 1-7); (3) deepened the sense of sin (17. 9-11); (4) gave the death blow to idolatry (10. 14-16); (5) declared for individual responsibility (31. 29-33); and (6) prepared his people for the impending national ruin, so that they could survive destruction of state and church, loss of land and ruin of temple, without surrendering the essentials of their faith (see 6. 18-20; 14. 11-12; 17. 9-10; 31. 16-

33). It was a great work that this prophet accomplished in spite of many and terrible oppositions that would have crushed lesser men.

Jeremiah's earthly reward was disappointing. He was banished from the temple precincts (36. 5-6), imprisoned (chs. 26, 32, 37, 38), his life threatened (chs. 20, 26, 38), his family torn from him and his home confiscated (10. 20), charged with treason (chs. 26, 38), his literary productions destroyed (ch. 36), and at length he himself kidnaped and carried by force to Egypt, where his last sermons were preached (ch. 43). Jeremiah's cup of bitterness was filled to the brim (20. 14). Jewish tradition adds that he was murdered in Egypt and his bones left to bleach on the sands of the Nile. Inasmuch as his religious contribution to humanity is immense and imperishable, can one say that he was wholly without reward? His great ideas, centuries ahead of his time, molded later Jewish thought profoundly. Jesus himself must have been strongly attracted by Jeremiah's sermons, which he read in the Old Testament, for Jesus quotes

him freely (see Matt. 2. 17; 16. 14; 27. 9; Mark 7. 21; compare Jer. 17. 9; 29. 12; 16. 14; Luke 6. 45). Some of Jesus's teaching so much resembled that of Jeremiah that the people believed the ancient prophet had reappeared (Matt. 16. 14).

The Sensational Ezekiel

The prophet Ezekiel, who must have been a young priestly student in the palmy days of Jeremiah, no doubt had his youthful soul kindled to a prophetic flame as he listened to this forceful preacher of righteousness. At any rate, Ezekiel seems to have imbibed a goodly portion of Jeremiah's spirit as well as the greater part of his teachings. It was left for this young prophetic follower, however, to apply his creative teacher's ideas under new and trying conditions in the land of captivity. When scattered like sheep without a shepherd, torn from native land, denied the temple courts and sacrifices, and separated from the presence of Jehovah, then it was that Ezekiel, by applying the living ideas of Jeremiah, saved Israel from infidelity.

Ezekiel's was a very practical ministry during the troublous days of the captivity. The Hebrews were homesick and doubting, as the sacred poetry composed in that period reflects. "By the rivers of Babylon, there we sat down, yea, we wept, when we remembered Zion. We hanged our harps upon the willows in the midst thereof" (Psa. 137. 1, 2). "My soul longeth, yea, even fainteth for the courts of the Lord: my heart and my flesh crieth out for the living God" (Psa. 84. 2). "When shall I come and appear before God? My tears have been my meat day and night, while they continually say unto me, Where is thy God?" (Psa. 42. 2, 3). No wonder that in this discouraged and dejected state of mind the skeptical captives taunted the prophet by saying, "The Lord hath forsaken the earth, and the Lord seeth not" (Ezek. 9. 9), and "The way of the Lord is not equal" (Ezek. 18. 25).

Ezekiel, like Isaiah and Jeremiah, was evidently highly educated, and, like his illustrious predecessor, Jeremiah, he was a literary man (Ezek. 1. 3). "An hand was

sent unto me; and, lo, a roll of a book was therein; and he spread it before me; and it was written within and without: . . . eat this roll, and go speak" (Ezek. 2. 9, 10; 3. 1). We have here probably a reference to the written sermons of Jeremiah, which this captivity prophet diligently studied and used. Ezekiel was what we might term a sensational preacher. He is found making liberal use of parables (chs. 15, 16, 19); visions—for instance, eating scroll (ch. 2), chambers of imagery (ch. 8), destroying weapons (ch. 9), cherubim (ch. 10), dry bones (ch. 37), and his lengthy vision of the future temple (chs. 40-48); realistic impersonations—such as mimic siege (ch. 4), publicly shaving his head (ch. 5), temple secrets revealed (ch. 8), mock removal of his furniture (ch. 12). He was also a great pastor and teacher (ch. 24), gathering about him the captives and diligently instructing them in the lofty prophetic religion. No other prophet was more resourceful, patient, diligent, methodical, and practical, than Ezekiel. He was a solid preacher in a sad situation. No one could have met the needs of

the captives better than he with his "pleasant voice" and "lovely song" (33. 32).

The Laconically Blunt Micah

Of the remaining prophets so very little is known that it is impossible to say much about their personal traits. We can only infer from their meager writings which are left to us the character of these prophets. The prophet Micah, a contemporary of Isaiah, must have been a poor country preacher (1. 1; 7. 1), but was full of vigor and convincing speech, able to condense religion into a single expression so striking as to be still quoted for its terseness and exactness. "Wherewith shall I come before the Lord? . . . Will the Lord be pleased with thousands of rams, or with ten thousand rivers of oil? . . . He hath showed thee, O man, what is good; and what doth the Lord require of thee, but to do justly, and to love mercy, and to walk humbly with thy God?" (6. 6, 8.) So deeply did Micah impress his words on Judah that the generation of the following century recalled his words (Jer.

26. 18). He was grim and blunt, poor and powerful.

The Great Unknown

The great unknown prophet who preached his sermons of consolation during the later period of the Babylonian captivity of Israel, and whose sermons have been incorporated in the book of Isaiah (chs. 40-55), was a flaming optimist. His messages were of hope and cheer, full of grace and beauty. As he had passed into the crucible of Israel's suffering, his spirit had been finely tempered. Compassion, meekness, and hopefulness radiated from his fruitful soul as fragrance from a rose. He did not scold like Amos, nor condemn as Hosea, nor denounce like Isaiah, nor plead like Jeremiah. He consoled, encouraged, and comforted the crushed spirits and bleeding hearts of the captives. "Comfort ye, comfort ye my people" (Isa. 40. 1). "Hast thou not known? hast thou not heard, that the everlasting God, the Lord, the Creator of the ends of the earth, fainteth not, neither is weary? He giveth power to the faint" (Isa. 40. 28,

29). Here we listen to a new note in Hebrew prophecy, made necessary in order to meet the changed conditions of scattered life and shattered hope and strained belief. "Speak ye comfortably to Jerusalem, and cry unto her, that her warfare is accomplished, that her iniquity is pardoned" (40. 2). Such was the burden of the message of this inspired soul to the conscience of weary men, hungry for soothing words from the heights of God.

The God who sends the biting winds also wafts the balmy breezes. He who sent the fire-eating Amos also sent the gentle "Second Isaiah"—as he is sometimes called. He tempers the wind to the shorn lamb. The timeliness of this prophetic message was justified by the temper of the age. Three classes of Hebrew hearers could profit thereby—the apostates (Ezek. 20; Isa. 45), the indifferentists (Isa. 48), and the faithful despondents (Isa. 51). He had a message for all.

The Church-Builder Prophets

The two church-builders of the restoration, Haggai and Zechariah, who struggled

to rebuild the temple, which had lain in ruins for two generations, give us a glimpse of the returned captives—poor, disappointed, and faithless (Hag. 1; Zech. 1). Twenty years after the return from Babylon these prophets found the temple still in ruins and the people still protesting that "The time is not come, the time that the Lord's house should be built" (Hag. 1. 2). These prophets delivered a series of rousing sermons upbraiding the people for dwelling in "ceiled houses" while the house of the Lord lay "waste" (Hag. 1. 4). These prophets placed patriotism and piety before private gain. The smothered spiritual flame was rekindled into flaming enthusiasm. Consequently, in B. C. 516, as a result of prophetic activity, the second temple was dedicated, and once more a monument had been erected to Jehovah's honor. The one hundred and eighteenth psalm was composed and used for the dedicatory service; an immense chorus sang it grandly: "O give thanks unto the Lord; for he is good: . . . Open to me the gates of righteousness: I will go into them."

The Impetuous Malachi

In the degenerate days, nearly a century after the captives had returned, and shortly before Ezra's reformation in B. C. 445, Malachi, which means "my messenger," raised his prophetic voice. Judging from the book of Malachi, he must have been a frank, bold, impetuous, and sentimental prophet. He is lacking, however, in the old prophetic grandeur, freedom, and grace which had marked the preexile preachers. He, nevertheless, met the social and religious conditions of his age with timely words. He dealt in the main with practical and local problems, such as proper sacrifices (1. 6-11), priestly abuses (2. 1-10), stingy giving (3. 7-12), religious experience (3. 13; 4. 3), and with the results of skepticism (4. 4-6).

The Humorist Jonah

The unique little prophet, whose sermons are recorded in the book of Jonah, is an enigma. He seems to have appeared late in the Old Testament history. His message ridicules Jewish national narrowness. He

stands out as the only prophet of a humorous vein. As the Hebrew mind was essentially serious, and seldom given to joking, it is the more surprising to find a prophet of wit. We often fail to grasp the great significance of this prophet's message because we are apt to treat this book as a joke. Jonah is not only a rare entertainer, but also a preacher with a fine message. He contends that God's revelations are not for private monopoly. Gifts must be shared; God's truth is as wide as the seas and as urgent as human needs. "The gift without the giver is bare."

The Pensive Daniel

The prophet whose message is found in the early chapters of the book of Daniel (1-6) is preeminently a prophet of fidelity. He can trust even where there is no visible ground for certainty. He can abide God's hour when the sky is dark and all goes dead wrong. The burden of his message is this: Trust God and he will keep you unharmed in lion's den or fiery furnace, for God is stronger than evil; he cares for his own with infinite tenderness. A great message was

this in the troublous days of Antiochus Epiphanes's religious persecutions of the Jew.

The Prophet of Judgment

The rest of the prophets—Zephaniah, Nahum, Habakkuk, and Joel—played minor parts in Hebrew and Jewish history. Next to nothing is known of their personal character. It may be inferred that Nahum was a realist by the graphic description he gave of Nineveh's fall (Nah. 1-2). Habakkuk was the prophet of doubt, issuing in certainty (Hab. 1-2). Zephaniah and Joel were the prophets of impending judgment.

Summing up, then, we may think of Amos as a John Calvin forging his thunderbolts; of Hosea as a Melanchthon, a keen but timid scholar, shooting his pointed shafts; of Isaiah as a Wendell Phillips, the silver-tongued reformer; of Micah as a Luther, rough and ready; of Jeremiah as a John Wesley, a refined and timid scholar driven by conviction into fierce public service; of Ezekiel as a Dwight L. Moody, a great soul-winner; of the Second Isaiah as a Phillips Brooks, a man with a melting

message for the whole world of sad and suffering humanity.

What a diversity of personalities God can use! How admirably each fitted into his time and filled the task assigned him! How different they were in their manner, training, mood, and message! But, falling under the same spiritual power, they sprang to their tasks and did them in God's chosen way. God has a place in his kingdom for each of us. What we sometimes lack is the eternal fire, which sets the soul aglow and imparts to our words passion. Personalities differ radically, but it is the same spirit in all—the Spirit of God, "which worketh in you both to will and to do of his good pleasure" (Phil. 2. 13). May God help us each to respond eagerly to his loving call to live our lives in the place and manner for which we are fitted by sacred and usable personality!

CHAPTER VII

THE PROPHETS AND THEIR WRITINGS

Signs and Symbols in Prophetic Writings

The ancient, but wise, old Socrates was fond of saying, "I would rather write on the hearts of men than on dead sheepskins." The prophets did both. Without their written records preserved and handed down to us, it is difficult to see how the prophets' message could have endured until now. Written language preserves the spoken word. It is the vessel in which the sacred and heroic past is bottled up for future use. We must not, however, come to think more of the bottle than of the contents, of the form than of the substance, of the letter than of the spirit of prophetic literature. Let us not forget, however, that the forms and styles of the writers affect scriptural meaning for us. Much depends on how we

view these writings and with what intent in mind we read them. The story is told of a stranger who passed a barber's window and caught the following sign, reading it thus:

"What do you think?
I shave you for nothing,
And give you a drink."

He stepped in, got his shave, and called for the drink. As he was leaving, however, the barber said, "Thirty cents, please," and called the man's attention to the sign, reading it thus:

"What! do you think
I shave you for nothing
And give you a drink?"

Numerous instances of this sort occur daily in wrongly interpreting written words. Words are the bearers of ideas, moods, and feelings. They are the signs we must employ to convey our experiences one to another. Since language is a signal system, whether it be an auto-honk, signpost, or written document, the key to the system must be understood in order to grasp rightly

the meaning intended. This meaning is easily misunderstood if the reader is wanting in knowledge or careless in his readings; and, far worse, if he is biased in favor of some meaning which he endeavors to extract therefrom.

This is no less true of the writings of the Hebrew prophets, at times, than of the barber's sign. The prophets used signs, symbols, illustrations, and various forms of Oriental figures, to convey their God-given ideas. In order to grasp these prophetic ideas we must possess the key to their signal-system, the Hebrew tongue. Theirs was a highly pictorial speech, teeming with Oriental imagery, borrowed from the life of their day. The prophets and their writings, then, must engage our attention in this study since we are able to reach the man of God only through his written word, preserved in the Old Testament (1 Chron. 29. 29).

Illustrious writers of every age have had their central and consuming themes. Ruskin rang the changes on personal worth; Carlyle preached the gospel of honest work; Matthew Arnold taught the worth of cul-

ture; Emerson's theme was plain honesty; that of H. G. Wells is eugenic reform; Arnold Bennett developed the gospel of psychic determinism; Bernard Shaw of social regeneration through evolution; and Rauschenbusch taught social reform through the evoking power of Christianity. The prophetic writers likewise had their themes. Amos preached the gospel of righteousness; Hosea, of love; Isaiah, of holiness; Micah, of justice; Jeremiah, of spirituality; Ezekiel, of personal responsibility; and the Second Isaiah of divine goodness through the glory of suffering.

Themes in Prophetic Writings

What themes, then, find most frequent expression in prophetic literature as a whole? Foremost, it is teeming with human life, or, rather, with the divine ideal for life. Be loyal, be true, be good, be upright, be chaste, be devout, be merciful, be honest, be neighborly, be all that Jehovah has a right to expect of his earthly children. These are the literary refrains of prophetic messages.

"What does Jehovah require of thee?" was every prophet's query (Mic. 6. 8).

His words, nevertheless, would not have challenged Israel nor have been valued enough to be preserved on parchment unless his manner of utterance had been in good form. It required literary ability, cleverness in expression, breadth of vocabulary, knowledge of affairs, acquaintance with science, art, and customs, and the possession of a rich personality. He must have been intellectually, as well as spiritually, fitted for his task. The prophets were men of exceptional promise and of rich quality, even before Jehovah laid his Spirit upon them. Capacity and capability, education and inspiration, depth of personality and soundness of ideas, clearness of vision and spiritual reach were their capital when they yielded their pens to the call of God. All these so-called natural gifts, of course, without the gifts of the "Spirit" would have left them sounding brass (1 Cor. 13. 1). On the other hand, the Spirit without natural endowment and training, seldom results in great religious leadership.

The Naturalness of Prophetic Writings

If we think of God as having given the spiritual life to the prophet in a normal way as he does to us, and the prophet as speaking out of the fullness of his God-touched heart as every messenger of God does today, we shall come to feel a closer spiritual kinship to the "man of God" and to find more interest, both human and divine, in his writings. Prophecy will seem like preachment and not like puzzles or predictions. Thus, it will cease to appear as a mechanical production forced from the prophet, like a speech from a phonograph.

This modifies the view, often held, that the prophet's words came directly from the hand of God; a literal product of God ready made, imposed arbitrarily upon the prophet. The author's personality, his thought and spirit, his style, his training, and human knowledge, entered into his spoken and written words. God is the source of the truth uttered, the spiritual fire in the prophet's soul, the infilling life of his genius,

and the conscious personal friend who sustains him. The prophet, nevertheless, expressed this infolding of the Almighty in as natural a manner as we express our own feelings of the divine life within us. So prophecy thus viewed is seen to be the fruit of prophetic life, as the sermon of a modern preacher is the fruit of his devoted life and inspired labors.

Does not the book of Amos, previously quoted, seem to be the prophet's own production, thus divinely prompted, as truly as John Wesley's sermons are his? Each is inwardly moved of God to express himself in keeping with his personality, his age, and his training. What he speaks as his own conviction echoes the mind of God.

Why need we insist that God should always act contrary to nature in order to manifest his life in us? Should we not expect him to act in keeping with his order, and so manifest himself most in and through the natural processes? God operates in natural events as truly as in miraculous manifestations. He is not limited to the natural order, as we understand it, but he seems to

prefer it. We do not say of a rose, "It is either natural or it is supernatural." The rose is both. It is natural as a natural thing; it is supernatural as to its basic life. God causes it to grow thus by a natural process revealing his life in its blossoms. God causes man constitutionally to "feel after him"; and when he is conscious of God, and yields his inner life to him, God can speak through him. Whichever way we think of prophecy, the fact remains that it is the Word of God. The fact is the same, though the way of interpretation differ from slavish literalism. At any rate, man grasps the fact of the divine message more readily through a mode of thinking that relates spiritual realities in a friendly way to natural processes.

The Growing Nature of Prophetic Writings

When the prophetic writings are viewed in this way, several delightful discoveries are made. In the first place, progress is found in the Bible, as in every other part

of God's world. "All scriptures given by inspiration of God," do not stand on a dead level. They rise and fall with the experience of the Hebrew people. Individually or racially, life rises out of the animalistic and moves toward the spiritual. This world has never been perfect, though good (Gen. 1); but it has been growing better. This is true of prophetic writing as well. The grand good seer, Samuel, could "hew Agag in pieces" (1 Sam. 15. 33) in the name of Jehovah, but ten centuries later Jesus, the flower of prophecy, said, "But whosoever shall smite thee on thy right cheek, turn to him the other also" (Matt. 5. 39). "All they that take the sword shall perish with the sword" (Matt. 26. 52). The change here is not in the character of the eternal God, who changeth not, but in a progressive revelation of God throughout Hebrew history. Samuel understood God in part; Christ understood him in full.

We are not troubled by apparent contradictions in the Bible when we remember that we are dealing with a growing revelation which rises with fuller and clearer experi-

ence from age to age. Is it not for us a sharp distinction between the rude and savage practices of the book of Judges and the life of suffering for others by the gentle Servant of God in the book of Isaiah? (Judg. 1 and Isa. 53.) In the course of five hundred years religious ideas had clarified. God's way in the Bible as in nature is developmental.

The Manifold Styles in Prophetic Writings

In the second place, prophetic writings display all the variety of literary form to be found in the utterances of our Western reformers and preachers. Hence history, parable, poetry, riddle, science, romance, and story, were all used in driving home the lesson intended, much as preachers use them now; and all available sources of information were drawn upon.

The earliest prophets, Moses, Samuel, and the writers of the histories of the books of Samuel, Judges, and Kings, gave us the prophetic narratives of Israel's past national

experiences. These valuable historical writings are known as the work of the early Hebrew prophets, many of whom we do not know by name. These authors do not write merely as historians, however, but used history to illustrate their sermons. The latter group of the prophetic writings bear the names, styles, and characteristic marks of their prophetic writers—Amos, Hosea, Micah, Isaiah, Jeremiah, and Ezekiel. These are among the best of Old Testament writings, which had first been spoken in public, then written down by the prophets themselves, or by their pupils, and subsequently collected and used for public instruction (Jer. 36. 28).

The prophetic writings not only vary with different prophets, but in the same prophetic book there may be composite productions reflecting different events and periods out of chronological order. Poetry, prose, narrative, and orations often succeed one another in the same book.

Take the book of Isaiah for example. It becomes a puzzle if treated on a dead level as the work of one prophet. The first thirty-

nine chapters, in the main, seem to have come from the pen of Isaiah, the peerless prophet, reformer, and statesman of Jerusalem, living a century and a half before the captivity of Judah. The description of his call to the prophetic career appears in the sixth instead of the first chapter, as we might expect; his prophetic inauguration in the fifth, just preceding the call; his denunciations of Judah's sins in chapters one to four; while his earliest experience with King Ahaz occur in chapters seven to eight. Chapters forty to fifty-six, written by an unknown prophet, often called the Second Isaiah, reflect the later period of the Babylonian captivity. They are wholly different in style and purpose, in themes and presentation, from the first thirty-nine chapters of the book. Clearly, we have in the book of Isaiah the sacred writings of at least two prophets living in different centuries. Such facts need not disturb us. They only mean that the different parchments, valued and preserved by prophetic followers, were in after years gathered into a single roll for sacred use.

The Fresh Human Interest in Prophetic Writings

In the third place, the prophetic literature takes on a new and fresh human interest to the reader. It is seen to drip with the honey of human events and to move in lively incidents. It brings a realistic sense of God's dealings with his servant, the prophet. For instance, Isaiah describes in terms of kingly splendor and court imagery, scenes in which most of his life had moved; he tells of his soul's meeting with God and of the new sense of surrender to God's will (ch. 6), or he composes a love-song laid in a vineyard, sets it to music and sings it at some public gathering (ch. 5); or, taking his son by the hand, he meets the cowardly and vacillating king, Ahaz, near the upper reservoir and pleads with him to trust in God and keep out of entangling political alliances (ch. 7); or, he paints a signboard and nails it to a tree as a warning, "Speedy prey, speedy spoil"; or, laying aside his customary raiment for three years, he dons the mean garb of a slave in order to create right

public sentiment (ch. 20); or, he climbs upon the walls of Jerusalem during the desperate siege of Sennacherib to fire the patriotism of the dejected soldiers (ch. 36). This is surely all very real and very human. It sounds not unlike the experiences of God's great ministers of to-day. And yet, in all its naturalness, who can doubt that the inner power which stirs the human spirit is that of the living God?

This fascination in the real human life of the prophet meets the reader in every prophetic book. Amos at Bethel (chs. 1-2), Hosea in his love adventure (chs. 1-2), Nahum excitedly describing the fall of Nineveh (chs. 1-2), Jeremiah wearing a yoke to suggest the coming captivity of his people (ch. 28), or the shattering of the potter's vessel to show how Jehovah would break in pieces Jerusalem for her sins (Jer. 18), or being thrown into a miry well (ch. 32), or banished from the temple precinct (ch. 36), having his sermons burned (36. 23), arrested as a traitor or kidnaped and carried to Egypt; Ezekiel carried with captives to Babylon (1. 1), preparing a mock

siege (ch. 4), a mock flight from the city (ch. 12), symbolizing the fate of the land by cutting off the hair (ch. 5). Similar incidents are found in all prophetic writings, which show this literature to be teeming with concrete life. It is all in the day's work for God.

Literary Ability of Prophetic Writers

In the fourth place, the modern reader of the prophets comes to hold them in his esteem as genuine men of practical worth. The reader discovers that the Hebrew prophets were men of good training. They were literary men, authors, orators, historians, reformers, preachers, poets, singers, and statesmen. They were men of marked ability in their time and were well known authors, as shown by frequent references made to their works. We read, "The books [writings] of Samuel, the seer" (1 Chron. 29. 29), "The book of Shemaiah the prophet" and "The story of the prophet Iddo," "the book of Jehu" (2 Chron. 12. 15; 13. 22; 20. 34). Now, writing was a rare accomplishment, even in Jeremiah's day.

In fact, nearly all of the Hebrew history was the product of the prophets. That the prophets from Elijah to Malachi could and did write is apparent (2 Chron. 21. 12; Mal. 3. 16). Their interest in letters was not a mere literary ambition. They wrote, as they spoke, with some definite moral and spiritual object in mind (Jer. 36. 3-7). Jeremiah, we learn here, was himself prohibited from preaching, but his pupil, Baruch, might read the prophet's sermons, which led to writing them. So that prophetic literature was in a sense a by-product of prophetic activity. It was a means to an end. It was an instrument of divine service used in the day's work for God.

Oral Style of Prophetic Writing

The manner of prophetic writing is revealed also in the messages of Jeremiah. He delivered these sermons twenty years before writing them. They were evidently memory reproductions of the substance of his earlier teaching adapted to his present object. Hence they retain much of the oral style and impassioned oratory of the

prophet. What we learn about Jeremiah's mode of writing we may assume to be largely true of other prophets. The prophet's writings are mainly direct address; hence, we feel the Hebrew audience present as we read them. His words waft to us across the centuries the living atmosphere of those ancient times. We sense the presence of his hearers.

The prophet's writings came naturally out of the life and objects of the time. He tried to meet emergencies on the spot. He eagerly grasped a chance to drive home a moral truth for a specific need of his people. The prophets were always ready with a message when it was needed. They were students of history and applied past events to present conditions in Israel. Note, for example, Jeremiah's readiness to answer hard questions (Jer. 21); or his sermon of the potter's clay, suggested by seeing a potter at work (ch. 18); or his sermon on the temple, produced by hearing the false prophet's cry, "Our bones are dried, and our hope is lost: we are cut off for our parts" (Ezek. 37. 11). Thus, the prophetic writ-

ings were steeped in the life of the people and prompted by vital issues before his eyes. The man of God was thus a true child of his age, a faithful servant of Jehovah, and, therefore, a contributor to every age.

Present Use of Prophetic Writing

Lastly, what use can we make in our day of this prophetic literature? Why should we read it? Our chief business is to understand and master ourselves that we may live well and usefully among others. To do this we need to know the past as well as the present. What the prophet has achieved for himself he may accomplish for us. His writings bear his message and reveal his spirit of fearless faith, courageous hopefulness, and genuine insight into the needs and conditions of his day. Such is the brilliant, earnest, convincing style which is able to convey to us of later times something of the ancient prophetic power and spirit which we crave.

CHAPTER VIII

THE PROPHETS AND THEIR IDEAS

The Universality of Prophetic Ideas

"Man has arrived, and what a world he has at his service!" Anybody can exist, but it is a greater thing to live. The reason some people are so small is that they think and live so little. One has to live a big life not to be forgotten in a generation. To live a small life and deal in trifling ideas is to be hermetically sealed in a vacuum. The prophets of Israel, who wrought in the long, long ago, still live in their imperishable utterances. They thought in large terms and worked with big ideas; they were mastered by these ideas, and with them mastered others.

Why should the ideas of ancient seers concern us to-day? This is not an idle question, for the influence of the prophet on us to-day is immense. The answer is that a

sound idea spoken anywhere is sound everywhere. Truth is universal; its home is wherever man is. Why should we value the words of the prophets above the rest of the Old Testament? Because ideas, like coins, are valued for their usefulness as well as for their intrinsic worth. A dollar is worth more than a dime because it will do more for us and will better promote our welfare. It is so with ideas. As we use them they bless us, enrich us, and give us mastery in the world. Those ideas which are universal and necessary in the ongoing of life are of most worth. Such ideas the prophets held and proclaimed. Therefore they remain undying and vital. They yet speak, though dead.

But even moral and spiritual ideas are of varying worth, so that not all prophetic ideas are of priceless value. The injunction of Isaiah, "Cease to do evil; learn to do well" (Isa. 1. 16, 17), is of more value than "Howl, ye ships of Tarshish" (23. 1). Likewise there are distinctions in moral messages. To be righteous is better than to be generous, though both are excellent virtues. Goodness is intrinsic and makes its declara-

tion in moral actions stimulated by sound ideas.

Living Ideas of the Prophets

There are a half-dozen great ideas around which life centers. They constitute the cardinal principles of man. To have these articulated in action is to be mighty. Did the prophets of Israel possess such cardinal ideas? They did; or, rather, the ideas possessed them; and therein lies the chief value of the prophets for us. They were aflame with these ideas. Though each prophet had his distinctive message, they all had certain cardinal ideas in common, and used them in different connections with varying clearness and stress. They were always in evidence. Unceasingly the prophets proclaimed them. They underlay all that the prophets said and did. There were about seven of these vibrant conceptions, living ideas, or governing principles in the prophetic creed. They were not proclaimed in order, of course, but used as practical need required. The few great truths which they saw and that had mastered them, they were masters in giving

out. This mastery they had gained by lively contact with great events.

Jehovah's Supremacy

First of all, the prophets believed in the absolute supremacy of Jehovah. He was Creator of all things (Isa. 40). He had unlimited control over nature (Amos 1. 2). His purpose ran through history (Isa. 28. 14-21). To the prophets, God moved toward a goal and shaped all movements. Nothing ran with aimless feet. Nothing happened by chance. All events were divinely ordered. He worked through men to accomplish his purposes (Isa. 37. 21-38). Natural agents were his ministers (Psa. 104. 4). Nothing is withdrawn from his providential government (Isa. 10. 24-27), great or small, remote or near, past or future, material or spiritual (Isa. 10. 5). God is supreme. "By the strength of my hand I have done it, and by my wisdom; for I am prudent: and I have removed the bounds of the peoples, and have robbed their treasures, and I have brought down as a valiant man them that sit on thrones; and

my hand hath found as a nest the riches of the peoples; and as one gathereth eggs that are forsaken, have I gathered all the earth: and there was none that moved the wing, or that opened the mouth, or chirped" (Isa. 10. 13-14).

This conception of God was not merely an abstract theory with the prophet. It was for him a living reality, ground into his soul. It was a living, working fact which moved his whole life. The supreme God of the world was seen by the prophet in the heavens, heard in the storm, traced through history, and felt in his soul. To him God seemed to be his living, daily, inspiring, personal friend. The prophet was companioned with Jehovah. He talked to him and heard him speak, received his messages, pleaded with God in behalf of his people (Jer. 10, 11, 15, 18). These men were God-intoxicated. They were men who lived in such vivid realization of God's fellowship that he could whisper his eternal truths into their open ears, and the warm breath of heaven fanned their being into a holy enthusiasm which found boundless expression in pas-

sionate preaching and courageous action. Across the centuries their preaching is still recognized as the voice of God. Such a sense of God will make any life heroic, saintly, and blessed.

Jehovah's Impartial Justice

The prophets believed that this personal God was unique in character by being impartial in his justice and infinite in his mercy (Mic. 7. 18-20). This unique doctrine of the prophet marks a new day in religion, for the rest of the ancient world still believed in many gods,—gods capricious and gods revengeful and lustful. The God of the prophets was righteous to the core. Indeed, to Amos, the center of God's character is summed up in the word "righteous" (chs. 3, 4); to Hosea God is the compassionate one (ch. 2), to Micah he is the just God (ch. 2), and to Jeremiah the spiritual God set in the heart (ch. 31. 33). To all of them Jehovah is the God of impartial justice and infinite mercy. He punishes sin by storm and earthquake, fire and sword, pestilence and famine (Ezek. 5. 12). Yet he often

waits patiently, delays the evil day, relents when pleaded with, forgives when repentance is shown, and loves his wayward people to a fault (Mal. 3. 16, 17). "Is it possible," breaks forth a recent writer in a comment on our times, "that we make the doing of good an excuse for not doing right?" That God is righteous needs still to be thundered into the ears of men.

Life a Holy Mission

In the prophetic creed life is a holy mission from God. Israel was an elect people, "chosen of God out of all nations." With them he had covenanted to keep, prosper, and bless, if they, on their part, obeyed and honored him. But Israel was chosen for a purpose, to fulfill a high spiritual vocation. Israel was to be the bearer of the true religion, and to be the spiritual teacher of all nations. Therefore, an exceptional responsibility rested upon Israel as the people of God to qualify for its mission. This idea of divine election with special privileges was echoed by all the prophets. "You only have I known of all the families of the earth,"

protested Amos (3. 2); "When Israel was a child, then I loved him, and called my son out of Egypt," sobbed Hosea (11. 1); "For I brought thee up out of the land of Egypt, and redeemed thee," pleaded Micah (6. 4); "The people which I formed for myself, that they might set forth my praise," rang out Isaiah (43. 21). Hence, a nation has a mission under God; a person has a mission under God. Each must find and fill his mission, and do it in God's way, or perish from the earth. Our national mission for one thing seems to be the spread of democratic ideas.

Disciplinary Nature of Misfortune

The prophets believed that the present evils in the world were sent by Jehovah because man was wicked. The evils which were visited upon Israel were Jehovah's rods of correction. Sin had caused God to change the original perfect order and turn it to corrective uses. The most common divine scourges were war, pestilence, famine, and earthquake (Isa. 10. 16; Amos 1. 2; Jer. 23. 9-12; Ezek. 5. 12). Is it not so

that the most stubborn, ugly, and persistent fact among men is sin? Nevertheless, are we not persuaded that sin can be eradicated by the help of God?

"Sin is the only prison that binds the human soul;
Love is the only angel that bids the gates unroll;
When he shall come to lead thee, arise and follow fast;
Though it leads through darkness, it leads to light at last."

Redeemability of Man and Society

The prophets believed that the original created order of the world could be restored only by man being morally restored to divine obedience. The supreme task was to secure man's obedience to God. Two things stood in the way:

1. Man's evil will.
2. Man's ignorance of God's will.

What was the prophet's remedy?

1. Man's evil will must be made good.
2. Man's ignorance of God must be removed.

How was this to be accomplished?

1. By means of a chosen people whom God will train and lead and put his Spirit upon.
2. To whom he will reveal his will and way through chosen men, priests and prophets, poets and sages.

Now, Israel was that people. Prophets, priests, and princes were his chosen leaders. The king was the national protector. The priest was the custodian of law and worship. The prophet was the revealer of Jehovah's word. Hence Israel was to become "a kingdom of priests, and a holy nation" (Exod. 19. 6).

The Ultimate Triumph of Good

The prophet believed with all his soul in the ultimate triumph of good in the world. Jehovah would win out; his order would succeed. With the prophet good was stronger than evil. God was mightier than sin. Therefore the prophet was a confirmed optimist, not by temperament, but by creed. The darker the present appeared, the brighter shone the future for the prophet.

The uglier the evil day frowned, the clearer the man of God foresaw the face of the redeeming One (Isa. 54).

This optimism is the perennial nature of every righteous, God-fearing soul. Is it not carried naturally in the human heart and confirmed beyond a question through a right view of God? If one believes stoutly that God is at the center of things, and that wrong is hateful to God, then one must believe with equal force that all wrong, be it the liquor traffic, child-labor, the sweatshop, or any other form of wrong, will cease some time, somehow. (See Isa. 2, 4; Mic. 4. 1-5; Jer. 31. 11; Ezek. 34. 23-27; 37. 12).

How was this optimism to be realized? For the Hebrew prophets, it was to be characterized:

First, by judgment followed by peace, which to the earlier prophets was "a day of Jehovah" (time indefinite); while to the later prophets it was "the day of Jehovah" (time definite). At first it was to be the joyous presence of God; later it was to be a terrible day of vengeance upon all enemies of God. Yet more and more the note of

peace sounded forth. In this Isaiah led the prophetic chorus (2. 4).

Secondly, it was to be characterized further by the actual presence of God in universal prosperity and blessing (Ezek. 37. 12-14). Out of this prophetic creed sprang the Messianic expectation. God would some day send his Deliverer, princely and peaceful, righteous and holy, prophetic and kingly, to set all things right. With each generation this hope became firmer and clearer until it was finally fashioned in the heart of the sorrowing captives of Babylon (Isa. 54). After weary, waiting centuries, in Bethlehem of Judæa the angels of God announced his arrival, and the cross sealed his Messianic work when he said, "It is finished."

The Prophetic Gospel of Social Good

Again, out of this prophetic creed came the impetuous social program of the prophets. Hence they were reform preachers who took a fearless and uncompromising stand against the brood of social wrongs thriving in their day. They pleaded pas-

sionately the cause of the poor and needy, against whom the priests, the nobles, the judges, and the kings conspired. The poor of the land were entirely at the mercy of these robber classes. The kings robbed them in taxes; the judges decided against them for lack of fat fees; the nobles robbed them of their lands; and the priests often cheated them out of the consolation of religion. Under such a system of robbery the poor had nowhere to turn. The government, the courts, and the sanctuary knew little argument but coin, and they measured pity by pay. The masses were helpless. They faced starvation or serfdom. However, Israel's poor were unique in having brave champions to plead their cause, while the poor of other lands had no voice raised in their behalf. The three hundred and fifty years, stretching from the conquests of David to the fall of Judah, were years of ceaseless protest by the prophets against social evils in the land.

What is at the bottom of this prophetic social plea? The belief that the perfect social good is the divine purpose, since the cardinal nature of God himself is ethical

goodness. Hence to be righteous is to be most ethical in life. Read such declarations as the following: Amos 5. 21; Hos. 4. 6; Isa. 11. 4; Mic. 6. 6-12; Jer. 23.

Who to-day can be strong and good without the absorption of these living ideas? The elemental needs of life are found in the prophet's creed: (1) a worthy and dominating ideal, (2) a conscious intimacy with God, (3) a resolute and helpful social life. Thus, to be intelligently good is to be infinitely great.

The Prophetic Standard of Morality

The prophets made a high standard of morality the chief concern of Israel's God. No ancient nation was without its moral demands. Egypt, as witnessed in her Book of the Dead, had a religion full of moral precepts though largely negative in tone. Ancient Babylon had its moral codes and governing customs, calculated to regulate human life and social relations, as minutely revealed in the Code of Hammurabi. The ethical codes of other ancient peoples were buttressed on religion as was the Hebrew

code. What, then, was the essential difference between them? The prophetic distinction of ethics lies in its elevation and in the insistence upon taking it seriously. The prophetic standing of ethics became an issue, paramount to authorized religious customs. They portrayed Jehovah as the universal embodiment of right living. Other peoples could call upon their gods for help in misfortune or for vengeance upon an enemy irrespective of the ethics involved. But Israel, according to prophetic interpretation, could hope for divine aid only when her cause was just. It was this preeminence which distinguished the Hebrew prophets from all other ancient teachers. Even Hebrew priests failed to appreciate the high ground taken by the prophets. The anger of Jehovah was never more aroused than over flagrant and repeated violations of the universal moral requirements. (See Amos 1, 2; Hosea 3, 4; Isa. 1-4; Jer. 7. 1-15.) Hence, with them ethical demands took no account of national boundaries, racial differences, or social rank. All must subscribe to God's moral demands or encounter his

wrath. This was an unprecedented and polar advance in the world's morality. This in itself raised Israel to a new standard, a higher plane of existence, and marked her history as different from that of her neighbors.

CHAPTER IX

THE PROPHETS AND THEIR RELIGION

In Mr. Britling Sees It Through the author has turned his dazzling intellectual search-light upon his own religious struggle. At the startling news that his own boy, Hugh, is off for the front, Mr. Britling, the hero of the novel, spends a wakeful night thinking—thinking: "How stupidly the world is managed! Our only strategy was to barter blood for blood—trusting that our tank would prove the deeper. While in this tank stepped Hugh, young and smiling. . . . Hugh wrote more frequently than his father had dared to hope. . . . Mr. Britling had the greatest difficulty in writing back. There were many grave things he wanted to say, and never did. . . . Once or twice, with a half-unconscious imitation of his boy's style, he took a shot at the theological and philosophical hares that Hugh had started.

. . . There are many things of that sort that are good to think and hard to say. . . ."

One feels that way about taking a "shot" at the prophet's religion. There are things "that are good to think about and hard to say." It may seem odd to some that one need speak of the prophets' religion. It is a matter, of course, taken for granted. However, let us risk a "shot" at the cardinal "hares" which make up the personal faith of the prophets. We might as well own up to it that we cannot let "things of that sort" alone. "For good or ill we are incurably religious." Our restless theological "hares" have to be exposed to an occasional gunning.

The Prophets' Spiritual Attitude

First, we may note that their whole life was charged with spirituality. It was a psychic state of mind. They had an ear for God as the musician has for sound or as the painter has an eye for sunsets. God lay back of all their motives and powers as a mighty living force. The whole man was open, wide open, to spiritual values. The

prophet was orientated in eternity. The past, present, and future lay spread out in an eternal purpose and grasp, watched over by the unsleeping but unseen eye of God. He grasped and related all the broken threads of existence in the one eternal idea of the will of God. His preaching and his teaching, his political and social activities were rooted in the same soil—his dominating spiritual passion for an eternal reality. God stood under the prophet's conviction like an adamantine foundation. The vague but confident feeling that one's soul rests in God is true religion.

Man's chief concern is not how to exist but how to live—how to live and get others to struggle in the light of a right standard of conduct; to teach man how he should think, feel, and act in his complex social relations is a huge task. Human happiness and social progress must be solved, or resolved, in conduct and character; and character must be builded upon an adequate ideal. The Hebrew prophets set forth and urged a dominating ideal. The center of their ideal was the God of righteousness,

and their passionate preaching aimed at a reign of righteousness among men. Hence the prophets gave a new impetus to the Hebrew moral consciousness. They taught with freshness, authority, and originality because they were charged to the fingers' ends with the eternal elixir. They gave, therefore, new interpretations of life, of religion, of ethics, of history, and of society. They universalized the religion of God; they moralized his character; they purified religion; they intensified personal worth; they spiritualized worship; they idealized the future and they laid the basis for a new social order. To know the religion and the morals of the prophets is, therefore, of supreme importance.

The Prophets' Writing as Religious Instruction

Even the historical books of the Old Testament are prophetic productions, written in the spirit of prophetism to teach moral and spiritual lessons. This was recognized by Hebrew scholars, who divided the entire Old Testament into three sections: (1) The

Book of the Law, comprising the five books of the Pentateuch; (2) The Book of the Prophets, divided into two sections, (*a*) the "Former Prophets," the historical books of Joshua, Judges, Samuel, and Kings, (*b*) the "Latter Prophets," divided into four, Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, and the Twelve; (3) The Writings, which make up the chief poetic, dramatic, and the late historical books. The "former" prophetic histories appear to have been composed in part from (*a*) an early Judæan history, and (*b*) an early Ephraimite history, freely drawn upon by later Hebrew scholars.

The chief character of the records from Joshua to Kings is that of religious instruction through history. The book of Joshua preaches the sermon of the mighty hand of Jehovah which was with Joshua in the conquest of Canaan, the land of promise (Gen. 15. 18; Deut. 11. 24; Josh. 1. 1-9; 5. 13-15). The book of Judges preaches prophetic sermons in history to impress the simple truth that God rewards national virtue and punishes national vice. "The children of Israel did that which was evil in the sight of the

Lord," is an oft repeated text (2. 11; 3. 7; 4. 1).

The books of Samuel preach through history the sermons of the religious progress of Israel under God-fearing leaders.

The books of Kings give the prophetic protest against wicked and worldly kings who cause Israel and Judah to sin. These histories, then, are histories tempered in the prophetic religious experiences with God. The later prophetic books are, of course, obviously sermonic in character, and in composition. They ring with the preacher's call and throb with fervent appeals. They are styled in direct speech. We do well, therefore, to observe the religion of the prophets and to ask what the religious factors were which made up the splendor of their lives. Their own religious life, then, merits our attention.

The Prophet's Consciousness of God

First is the prophet's own inner sense of God, looked at as a unique personal experience. These men, as has been noted, were God-intoxicated. They had the sense of

pleasurable, personal communion with God. They were recognized by the common people, on this account, as the "man of God" (1 Sam. 9. 10), as spokesmen for God (Jer. 23), as possessors of God's mind who could, therefore, lift the veil of the future, if Jehovah permitted it (Dan. 10. 1).

They were themselves conscious of the closest communion with God (Jer. 31. 16-19). They spoke to God as to a fellow man (Jer. 11. 23-25). They heard God speak to them (Zech. 4. 1). They were called to their prophetic tasks by God himself in some supernatural manifestation (Ezek. 1, 2). Whatever the outward circumstance, the inner experience was real.

This was possible only on the supposition that God had created at the center of the prophet's soul a sense of divine companionship. He was, therefore, convinced of being God's mouthpiece, God's anointed. Here is fundamentally a sense of living unity rather than a thought refinement from which springs his personal God-life and his doctrines of religion. Hence, it is Jehovah who sends him, empowers him, befriends him,

enlightens him, inspires him, and uses him. It is as the friend of God that the prophet faces mob, court, or priest to satisfy his God-friend.

Is it possible for men now to so realize the enveloping presence of God? So, at least, believed the prophets (Joel 2. 28, 29). They had no idea that it was peculiar to them or their age (Zech. 9. 9, 10). To-day, when science speaks with authority the words of inflexible law, we seem to imagine the world bound in fetters of determinism. Hence timid souls find it hard to believe in the direct inner touch of the Spirit. Humble followers of God, however, still experience the touch of a quickening hand. Is law stronger than God? Or, is God the strength of law? Is he who inhabits eternity ordered by law, or doth he order all according to law? Nature with her laws is one side of God's great universe; and soul, with spiritual order, is the other. "Hast thou not known? Hast thou not heard, that the everlasting God, the Lord, the Creator of the ends of the earth, fainteth not, neither is weary?" (Isa. 40. 28). How may we reach God in

this matter-of-fact age? The prophet's world was instinct with God. Shall we believe that he spake only in books of the dead, and doubt whether he speaks now in the souls of the living? "For I am the Lord, I change not" (Mal. 3. 6), was the prophetic belief. In this age of "insurrection of doubt" we need the prophet's call to a restoration of faith. If we face upward, we shall better go forward.

The Prophets' Piety

The prophets were men of genuine piety. "Piety" is not a very attractive word to use because it is a term now held in contempt by many as standing for something flabby and unreal. It is, nevertheless, the term which best expresses what the writer wants to convey, since there is a real piety which everyone respects. Dictionary piety is dangerous; advertised piety is punctilious; individual piety may glory in superior sanctity; collective piety may take delight in litany; but true piety is natural, spontaneous, and a matter of the heart. The piety which the prophets possessed was the fra-

grance of the divine life which surged through them like God's life in the rose. They just could not help living fragrant lives. True piety is not forced; it is fed. It is not manufactured; it is manifested.

Let us call to mind for a moment the defects of the popular piety in Israel during the prophetic times. First of all, piety was then prescribed, mapped out. It consisted in doing certain things which were thought sacred. The average Hebrew believed himself pious if he said his prayers three times a day facing the temple, if he kept prescribed feasts and fasts, if he offered customary sacrifices and observed the regular Sabbaths, if he went thrice yearly to the feasts and joined in the ritual, if he gave gifts to Jehovah and alms to the poor, and if he kept the commandments in form even though he broke them in spirit. Now, there is good in religious forms, but Hebrew piety was slipping into barren formalism, so that the same people who were formally good were, in practical living affairs, actually wicked. It is just this contemptible "piosity" which the prophets so vehemently

denounced. Let Amos voice the feeling of all the prophets in this regard when he counseled: "Seek the Lord, and ye shall live; . . . ye who turn judgment to wormwood, and leave off righteousness in the earth, . . . for I know your manifold transgressions and your mighty sins. . . . Seek good, and not evil, that ye may live: and so the Lord, the God of hosts, shall be with you, as ye have spoken" (Amos 5). Is not the condition at this hour the same in spirit though different in form? Millions go to mass or meetings, sing their songs, chant their collects, offer their gifts, and feel religious; while child-labor, sweatshop oppression, cutthroat competition, municipal graft, slum tenements, white-slave traffic, and the rum evil flourish all about them; and the worst is that they can hardly be moved with compassion for the multitude affected thereby.

Prophetic piety gripped the very innermost soul. These men gave and urged worship in very truth and spirit. Set forms, stated hours, prescribed feasts, and all the pious machinery they held to be meaningless

noise unless the very spirit of life itself was true and genuine. Life in toto was sacred and not given moments or certain postures, or staged days and seasons. It called for constant spiritual renewal at life's center. "For mine eyes have seen the King, the Lord of hosts" (Isa. 6. 5).

The Religion of Prophet Versus Priest

In the religion of the prophets there was a sharp cleavage between the worth of the ritual life and the value of the real life. With the priest, the right sanctuary life was fundamental; with the prophet, the right social life was cardinal. The priest placed sacrifices of beasts foremost, while he complacently tolerated bad morality; the prophet placed morality uppermost, while he tolerated sacrifices (2 Sam. 24; Hos. 6. 6).

How could this sacrificial practice have gained first place in the priestly sanction, if it were as objectionable as the prophets protested? Devout and conscientious men do not perpetuate with vigor wholly worth-

less practices as cardinal issues; for, after all is said, the priests were devout persons who strove to honor God. It is, therefore, a difference of viewpoint honestly held between priest and prophet as to whether the cardinal issue in loyalty to God rested in ritual righteousness or in real righteousness. How, then, shall we explain the critical attitude of the prophets and the clinging attitude of the priests toward the sacrificial cultus?

The sacrificial system, like all good things wrongly placed, contained for Israel both social and religious worth which priestly zeal had raised to the highest pitch until it actually superseded morality. There was much in sacrifices which contributed to the life of the ancients. The popular notion of eating a friendly meal with Jehovah satisfied the human craving for divine comradeship in the earthly life. For what else is religion but living, loving companionship with God? "We and God have business with each other," said William James. The thought too of bringing (to the altar) a gift which the worshiper prized highly and

which he believed Jehovah would value, fed the human sense of honoring one's superior and insuring men of Deity's continued protection and favor.

The sacrificial cultus gained sanction and high favor, no doubt, also from the fact that it contributed much to Israel's life. It was an age barren of a rich, complex social life, lacking our modern conveniences and curses. The pilgrim feasts at famous shrines were social equivalents of to-day. As every sacrifice involves a feast and every feast a sacrifice, the sanctuary place was yearly, or thrice yearly, swarming with gaily attired Israelites, happy and sociable. All joined in music and song, laughter and gaiety, eating and drinking, visiting and worshiping. These religious feasts became the social centers of Israel's life.

No wonder that the sacrificial feasts gained great sanctity, and that they were supposed to please Jehovah more than all else. No wonder there were temptations to abuse. No wonder they rose above morality in the heart of the Canaanite people. No wonder that over this ritual sys-

tem the priest and prophet clashed to the bitter end. No wonder that here centered the issues of church reform. Hence, while priest cried, "Ritual before morality," prophet protested, "Morality before ritual." "To what purpose is the multitude of your sacrifices unto me? saith the Lord," cried the eloquent Isaiah. "I am full of the burnt offerings of rams, and the fat of fed beasts; and I delight not in the blood of bullocks, or of lambs, or of he goats. . . . If ye be willing and obedient, ye shall eat the good of the land" (Isa. 1. 11, 19).

The Hebraic struggle between Ritualism and Vitalism as the church's primary function culminated in Judaism, a compromise between ritual and moral supremacy. The age of the prophet was followed by the age of the priest. The priest stepped into the place vacated by the prophet. The spiritual fires of the prophet were exchanged for the altar fires of the priest. "After all, the paramount object of the church is neither an impressive ritual, nor correct doctrinal belief, nor emotional enthusiasm, nor ecclesiastical efficiency. The

paramount object of the church is the human soul; these other objects are secondary and subsidiary."

The Prophets' Religious Mysticism

In the religion of the prophets there was what we may call the mystical sense. The prophets, like all great spiritual leaders, were religious mystics; that is, they felt and faithed themselves in some immediate, some invisible, and often undefined influence which touched and fired their earthly lives and made them partakers of the timeless and spaceless, the immaterial and imperishable reality. This was something more and better than merely a mental solution of life's mysteries. It was the soul's resting place, where alone is found abiding satisfaction for the troubled heart. This "over-life," which the prophets sensed, took the doctrinal form in their theology of the supremacy of Jehovah—God over all (Isa. 40).

The prophets rested with confidence in the unchanging purposes of God. They believed that God had mapped out a pro-

gram and would carry it through. While empires changed and opinions shifted, the prophets held their certainty. They stood unmoved when others doubted. They calmly awaited the issues when kings despaired of the outcome. They remained serene in the face of insufferable difficulties. "In quietness and in confidence shall be your strength" (Isa. 30. 15). This mysticism sometimes runs to excess and to pantheism, but it is not necessary that it be so. It may also run to a sane and scientific personalism in nature.

The prophets lived and behaved as if cared for by some one invisible. Whether it is possible to scientifically prove that there be the One who cares or not, the great unassailable fact remains that men and women have such experiences: believe that they are divinely cared for, and feel themselves sustained by a mighty hand. Such a sense is certain to pitch life to a higher key. Blind Milton felt it when he cried, "I cannot write till the spirit comes." George Eliot was dimly conscious of it when she said, "The best I have ever written came I know not

from whence." Was it not this same divine security which enabled Longfellow to write those sweet words over the death of his child?—"Last night the angels came, and little Lucy went with them." Or Whittier, with tear-filled eyes, lisping this stanza:

> "In thoughts which answer to my own,
> In words which reach my inward ear,
> Like whispers from the void Unknown,
> I feel thy living presence here."

It was Tennyson's feeling, too, when he wrote:

> "That good shall fall
> At last—far off—at last, to all,
> And every winter change to spring."

To have converse with God is not a fanciful theory of theology, nor is inspiration "a clot of blood on the brain"; but a practical, solid, undeniable reality experienced by millions this very hour. An ounce of actual experience with God is worth a ton of the best theory concerning these matters. One swallow of water upon the lips is to the thirsty worth an ocean full of theory about

water. "O taste and see that the Lord is good" (Psa. 34. 8).

"There is a larger view,
There is a deeper breath,
And a diviner sound,
Than sense can e'er reveal.
To see the glory in the Infinite,
To feel the breath of the Almighty,
To hear the voice of the I Am—
This is to live."

Are we not now living in a time of returning mysticism? The world has grown restless in the clanking shackles of materialism. Matter, force, and motion to the modern mind are like offering stones for bread. They satisfy not. The sense of a great pervasive Presence in all life cannot still the mental and moral hunger of the soul so long as it is pictured as moving atoms and abstract force. It must have breathed into it the breath of life and become a living soul.

"Behind the dim unknown
Standeth God within the shadow keeping watch
above his own."

"Speak to him, thou, for he hears, and spirit with spirit can meet—
Closer is he than breathing, and nearer than hands and feet."

Such are the songs upon the lips of modern poet and ancient prophet alike. This personal view answers best to life's yearning call. The best witness to truth is found in life itself. The most reliable assumption concerning the invisible order is that one upon which the soul best thrives. Our intuition of God outbids our cold intellect about him. God may not be demonstrated, but he is divined. Science with all its noble work has sometimes attempted to view this world as a fatalistic mass of stuff doomed to eternal recurrence. Logic may seek to justify, but life invariably rejects whatever smothers the soul. The soul must have its air, food, and light in order to live and grow, no less than must the body. Everywhere there is a growing evidence of a returning faith in a spiritual reality. Modern prophet, poet, philosopher, and even the scientist, invest in spiritual liberty bonds.

Philosophers like Royce, Eucken, and Bergson are dissolving Spencer's materialism, as a mode of cosmic activity, into Spirit, or Life, or Consciousness of some kind as the ultimate reality. Popular books of fiction are breathing more freely the spiritual atmosphere. The common mass is feverishly attracted by the psychic, occult, and mystical demonstrations, cults, and plays. Witness the run of such psychical plays as The Mystic Mira in the leading theaters of the day, or the reading of Bennett's psychological novels. These are omens of the approach of a new spiritual trend. Though its expression be often sickly and sentimental, the spiritual is really striving to be heard and seen.

It is for the modern prophet in the living church of God to give it life and form, so that the present age shall be able to view the world in a spiritual setting, in which atoms become sparks of divine life; force, divine power; law, eternal purpose; ultimate reality, personal life; and the great God over all. For, as Emerson said, "The world was built in order and the atoms

march in tune." Then religion and science, physics and ethics, psychology and spirituality, work and worship, will have friendly relations and congenial resting places, thank God! We have reason to think that this is taking place to-day. Listen to the kindly words of present-day scientific authorities. The distinguished scientist Sir William Thompson has said, "We are bound to come to the conclusion that science is not antagonistic to religion, but a help to it." The great physicist Sir Oliver Lodge has generously recorded his religious attitude in these words: "I believe in one infinite and eternal Being, a guiding and loving Father in whom all things consist." Professor Meeham has confessed that "Scientific studies have strengthened my faith, strengthened it, indeed, to an extent that no study besides could have effected" (Biblical World, July, 1916, page 7).

Our greatest living scientists are strong believers in a Personalistic Universe and friends of the Christian faith.

The rule of the ancient mystics may be a fresh call to the modern mind. "Shut the

door of the senses and open the inward windows of the soul." For, as the poet wrote,

"The world is too much with us; late and soon
Getting and spending we lay waste our powers."

"The heart of all religion is a spiritual experience."

CHAPTER X

THE PROPHETS AND THEIR POLITICS

In Tom Brown at Rugby the author gives this choice bit of advice to the boys after one of their fist fights: "As to fighting, keep out of it if you can, by all means. When the time comes, if it should, that you have to say 'yes' or 'no' to a challenge to fight, say 'no' if you can. . . . But don't say 'no' if you fear a licking; . . . and if you fight, fight it out; and don't give in while you can stand and see."

The prophet was a clear-eyed, cool-headed fighter from his sandaled feet to his sun-beaten head. The prophets were obliged to "fight." If they were to stand for Israel's redemption, they had no choice in the face of political conditions but to "fight it out," not with fists, but by faith; not with spears, but by principles. They loved peace but they loved righteousness more. The

prophets as political reformers were indeed men of dauntless and unbendable fiber. "The bullet will hit the mark," says Emerson, "which is first dipped in the marksman's blood."

The fearless, forceful prophets, free from the bondage of impure imagery, unhampered by material anxieties, disentangled from social restraints, and independent of all patrimony, possessed of only a few great truths which they held with towering tenacity, could without reserve express their honest convictions upon any and every subject which touched the good of the Israelitic state. This they did freely without fear or favor. Above all, the prophets were men of the highest ideals, the clearest discernment, and the sincerest conscience.

Facing the Political Fury

How often the modern preacher is irritated, and sometimes intimidated by being told, "Stick to the gospel and let business and politics alone." The real minister knows too well the hypocrisy which lurks behind such admonition. The man's busi-

ness or politics, who offers the injunction, is probably shady. At such times prudence hammers at the door and sympathy turns devil's advocate. Shall the man of God "measure up to the test of full pews and swelling receipts" or speak the full counsel of God and "face the fury"? The bread-and-butter prophets were on hand before the time of Amos, and their progeny is with us at the present time; so are also the Amoses, thank God! Modern preachers, like ancient prophets, face the same task of getting business and politics under the sway of divine righteousness. As bearers of the divine truth they seek to bring righteousness into every phase of human life. The realms of business and politics have largely excluded the claims of righteousness. In these domains temptation to overreach is so tremendous, evil is so powerfully intrenched behind bulwarks of custom, intrigue, wealth, and organization that, as yet, hardly the first trenches have been taken and some of these have been retaken. The gospel must find a welcome in government, or war and wickedness will continue unabated.

The Law of the Jungle

There is work to be done. The man of God must hammer the modern conscience at the point of its unsocial activity until it quivers with discomfort and smarts with shame. Does not Kipling's Law of the Jungle still rule over the political domain?

Is it not strange that men are capable, on the one hand, of fine private lives, excellent domestic relations, and even reverent church devotions, while, on the other hand, the same persons can complacently carry on political or business careers by the laws of the jungle? This they frequently do, or seem to do, without inner distresses of conscience. What does such a condition imply? Does it not indicate that the message of the past has been mainly the gospel of private righteousness? Does it not also mean that the gospel of political righteousness has been neglected? The same standards of life, the same principles of conduct are not applied in private and public life. "Politics is politics and business is business," is the dictum. These two ungospeled far countries

must be invaded and evangelized by a fearless political gospel of downright rectitude. The modern clergyman feels that Hodder, the rector of Saint John's, is voicing his soul: "Ye're going to preach all this?" McCrea demanded, almost fiercely. "Yes," Hodder replied, "and more. . . . If it were merely a matter of doctrine, I would resign. It's deeper than that, more sinister." Hodder doubled up his hand and laid it on the table. "It's a matter," he said, looking into McCrea's eyes, "of freeing this church from those who now hold it in chains, and the two questions I now see clearly—the doctrinal and the economic—are so interwoven as to be inseparable."

Private Good and Corporate Greed

Men of our time must be made to feel that they are bad, infernally bad, unless they are as good in corporate and political conduct as they are in domestic relations, and that they apply the same moral laws as rigidly in the one as in the other. In the enormous social complexity, the fierce economic conflict, the unabated modern radical-

ism, the caustic appeals to class hatred, and the breakdown of old forms of authority, there is urgent need for daring, determined, eloquent, spiritual leaders who see the issues clearly and who will put them compellingly to the modern conscience. There must be an appeal to conscience which will win.

How shall we account for the keen prophetic interest in matters of state? What was there in the faith of the prophets that made them extend their divine mission to political reform? Several elements appear with prominence.

Prophetic Appeal to National Life

The prophet regarded himself as the divine ambassador to the divinely chosen people in their national life. The people of Israel believed that the prophet was commissioned of God to furnish guidance in the political turmoil of that age. He could not, therefore, escape being a political agitator. Matters of state fell naturally under the prophetic mission. Inevitably, therefore, in every national struggle he fought for Israel's

national preservation. The Hebrew state was looked upon as a necessary agency to help Israel forward in its march to the City of God.

Prophetic Appeal Through the Church in the State

The political activity of the prophet was further wrapped up in his religion because Israel's religion found expression in a state church. There was no thought in Israel, as with us, of a sharp separation between church and state, religion and politics. Before the exile to Babylon the state controlled the church; after the exile the church ruled the state. In preexile times the king often usurped priestly functions; in postexile times the priest played the role of king. The interests of state and church merged. They seemed never to have been clearly defined; their respective boundary lines were never definitely surveyed and marked off from each other. Since the religious life of his people was so dependent upon the state, politics and the good of the state found large interests in the prophet's activity.

Prophetic Plea for Political Ideas

The prophet found political activity attractive also because his consuming concern was the glory and the perpetuity of the kingdom of God. Most prophets were far more eager to save the national life of Israel as Jehovah's chosen people, than to save individual Israelites. They had, of course, concern for the individual and his good, but, primarily, in view of his membership in the state. The individual was of worth to the state, but had no significance apart from the nation. Jehovah was, therefore, most often thought of under the figures of King (Psa. 24. 10), Ruler (Isa. 9. 16), Judge (Psa. 75. 15), Prince (Isa. 9. 6). Hence, the religious figures were figures of state and state rulers. Jehovah was Supreme Ruler, whose will was law, and whose purpose was Israel's goal. Only adherence to the divine ideal would insure national glory. This is good doctrine for any nation.

Prophetic Political Principles

What were the political principles held

dear by the Hebrew prophets? They certainly did not struggle for the mere continuance of the nation. They held that the perpetuity of Israel's national life rested upon certain eternal principles which underlay all sound government. What, then, did the prophets strive to attain in their political reforms?

The Hebrew kings and nobles all too often relied upon material strength for national success and safety. The size of armies, the safety in walls, the astuteness of diplomacy, the splendor of courts, and the matrimonial ties with surrounding nations constituted their principal defenses. The prophets, on the other hand, almost uniformly placed their chief reliance for national safety upon the loyalty to Jehovah's will, trust in Divine Providence, purity and integrity in private life, justice and mercy in social obligations, majesty of law, and the equality of every Hebrew in the guarantee of his rights. The age-long struggle between kings and prophets centered about these two views of national security. It is the old human struggle between material

and spiritual supremacy in the earth. Kings were concerned with things of the passing moment, the prophets wrought for enduring ethical foundations.

The prophets championed the cause of national liberty for the good of all the people against the usurpations of ambitious rulers and aggressive national neighbors. Several matters claimed attention in order to safeguard Israel's liberties.

Competent Leadership

The prophets took an active hand in securing competent leaders for the nation. Prophets became king-makers. Samuel selected Saul and David (1 Sam. 9. 17; 16. 12-13); Nathan used his political strength in the royal intrigues at David's death to advance Solomon to the throne over the older son, Adonijah (1 Kings 1. 22-41); Isaiah and Jeremiah played important parts in the councils of state (Isa. 7, 8). Thus, the political activities of prophets helped to make and unmake kings and to mold the fortunes of the Hebrew state. The key to modern reform is competent leadership.

Property Protection

The prophets undertook to guard the ancient rights of the Hebrew landowners against the growing aggressions of powerful kings and nobles. The ancient law of Israel held every man's homestead sacred and inviolable. When, therefore, King Ahab was disappointed in an attempt to buy Naboth's vineyard, a small homestead of a humble Israelite, which the king wanted in order to enlarge his royal grounds, his daring queen, Jezebel, by intrigue, procured it for him. The matter might have passed and a dangerous precedent have been established which succeeding kings might have usurped in confiscating small farms for their royal estate. But the dramatic prophet Elijah fearlessly and vehemently defended the sacred right of property—and thus prevented a ruthless policy of political pilfering of small landholders. Through the political opposition of Elijah and Elisha, the reigning house of Ahab was eventually overthrown, its members destroyed, and the new house of Jehu established in Israel (1

Kings 19; 2 Kings 9). For five hundred years thereafter the prophets stood boldly against unjust aggressions of the rich and the secularization of life by visionless priests. The prophets stood unalterably opposed to all autocratic rule in Israel. They jealously protested against forced labor, heathen importation, and kingly tolerance of foreign religious cults and customs. Hence the God-fearing prophet stood between plutocrats and people, kings and serfs, politicians and poverty. Ahab spoke of Elijah as "he that troubleth Israel" (1 Kings 18. 17).

Evils of Entangling Alliances

The prophets, moreover, pleaded for national aloofness. They had no faith in entangling alliances. Hence, they counseled freedom from all secret compacts with other nations. They preached trust in Jehovah and the building of the state upon the enduring foundations of justice, freedom, mercy, and loyalty to the Supreme God. Thus, when political disaster threatened the state, the prophets availed themselves of the

opportunity to urge upon them Jehovah's demand for social morality and spiritual worship. The ancient prophet saw in the long, long ago what is sun-clear now in the European turmoil—that "secret alliances" and "balance of power" are unsafe political counsels (Isa. 30. 1-7).

Victor Hugo once wrote that the voice of the people is a fearful and sacred voice, which is composed of the roar of the brute and the speech of God that terrifies the feeble and warns the wise. "The voice of God" is, of course, not always reflected in the "voice of the people," but, in the long run, it is safer than the "divine right of kings." No self-constituted class of persons is or can be wise and good enough to fix the political good of all.

The prophets, however, seemed to believe that God's spirit was so diffused through the life of Israel as to make the people's fundamental cry the call of God. They saw in the mingling, combining, colliding confusion of popular party struggles a mighty divine tide sweeping on to the supreme goal of a glorious kingdom of God. After every

ebb and tide there comes "flooding in the main; and God's will is more perfectly done in terms of human life."

The Struggle for Mastery

In Israel's midst there were two opposing forces struggling for mastery. On the one hand, the conservatives—time-serving selfish aristocracy which usually found kings and politicians their representatives, then as now; on the other hand, the progressives—liberty-loving, independent minority which found expression through the sturdy prophets. The conflict raged with terrific blows of fierce eloquence by the one and intimidating brute force by the other. Then, as is the case among us now, these two tendencies struggled for supremacy in the life of the government. They lie, have always lain, at the roots of human life. "The uprising of the people," Roosevelt once said, "is mightier and wiser than conservative law." Aggressive personalities like Lincoln, rising from the common people, led the popular unrest to victory.

The Better World in the Making

Is it not this divine tide that has been rising, ever rising through the centuries, which has swept away many ancient oppressions —slavery, feudalism, dueling, and serfdom? Other oppressions, more modern, are cracking and crumbling under the pitiless modern exposures by painters and poets, prophets and preachers, philosophers and novelists, statesmen and reformers. An old English adage has it:

> "The law makes that man a felon
> Who steals a goose from the common;
> But leaves the greater felons loose
> Who steal the common from the goose."

By means of new forms of exploitation under democracy, while we have shouted ourselves hoarse about the great American principles of democracy—freedom of worship, freedom of speech, freedom of contract—the monopoly of big business has forged the shackles of "moneyed plutocracy" about our feet. "We are face to face with this burning issue," writes a recent

economist; "shall our civilization be helpfully democratic or selfishly plutocratic, with millions of the people paying tribute to corporations, whose possession of natural resources and control of strategic advantages enable them to dictate prices and fatten at the public expense?" "Coal fields, timber belts, mechanical trades, farm products," writes another, "have all passed into monopolistic control for a song." Yet another writes, "It strikes at the roots of democracy."

How are the present living problems in the political and social turmoil to be solved? The oppressions of pooled wealth, the menace of class hatred, the fury of organized violence, the shame of city slums, the foulness of crowded tenements, the corporate exploitation of amusements, and the plutocratic control of the press—these are new forms of the ancient oppressions which call for new applications of the old prophetic spirit and principles to solve them. The modern preacher, like the ancient prophet, is called upon to interpret these problems in the light of eternal demands. God hates in-

justice and wrong in every form and under every name. The eternal issue is drawn; religion and politics, economics and ethics, education and science, ideality and practicality, prayer and progress, God and man, clergyman and congressman, all mingle in the turmoil. Out of the dust and smoke of the struggle progress is perceived. Our God is marching on, and so is humanity. "The prophet made an inestimable contribution to the life of the state, but the life of the state was an imperative necessity to the prophet." We have set ourselves the task of making democracy real and thoroughgoing. We now dream of making "the world safe for democracy." The church must make democracy safe for the world by making it Christian.

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CHAPTER XI

THE PROPHETS AND THEIR PREDICTIONS

The coming of the prophets into the midst of Israel pitched her religious interests upon the borderland of the future. The hoary past and the vivid present were telescoped into the lurid future. The prophets believed, and it was believed of them, that they could tap the unseen world of its secrets (Ezek. 7). For this reason, they were held in highest esteem in Israel and were frequently consulted on matters of importance relating to the future. We, no doubt, revere the prophets most on account of their godly lives and their moral integrity, but the Hebrew people thought otherwise. To them the moral elevation of the prophets was mostly unwelcome, while their insight into the hidden mysteries of the future gave them standing (1 Kings 22).

It was an ancient belief that God had all knowledge of the future as of the past, and that sometimes, when he chose to do so, he revealed such knowledge to the prophets (Amos 3. 7). People consequently sought the prophets with gifts in order to learn whether some proposed enterprise would prove successful or not (1 Sam. 9. 5-14). Mankind has always loved a mystery and, above everything else, a glimpse into the future, for there lie life's hidden secrets. That is why every age has had its seers, its fortune tellers, its soothsayers, and its palmists who deal in future events (Luke 1. 70). It is well to remind ourselves at this point, that while Israel had thousands of seers and prophets, true and false, less than a score of them rose to high worth and lasting fame. "Mine heart within me is broken because of the prophets; . . . for both prophet and priest are profane," Jeremiah complained (Jer. 23. 9, 11). As for the bread-and-butter prophets, they were little more than Oriental fortune-tellers, predicting for pay (1 Kings 14. 22; Jer. 23). Hence when we talk about the prophets we

usually have in mind the noble few who rose to religious eminence in Israel and whose writings constitute at the present the loftiest spiritual literature in the Old Testament.

Use and Abuse of Prediction

Did the prophets forecast future events in an extraordinary manner? No one, I think, can carefully and candidly read the prophetic records of the Old Testament without being aware of the intuitive sweep of vision that passes at times across the borderland of bare human insight. The ordinary visual limit is transcended by these men; not always, not even generally, but sometimes, they scan the horizon like a searchlight and expose dark corners far distant from the place and time they occupy. At such rare moments they speak in the sure consciousness of men who have learned of God; they appear to stand in the presence of unborn generations, and, like Bellamy's Looking Backward, describe anticipatory events as if they constituted past history. Furthermore, there appears upon the historic horizon no other group of men of equal

inspirational foresight in matters of national movements. In this regard the Hebrew prophets of the Old Testament were nothing less than unique.

Bible incidents are not wanting in which both good and bad uses of divine secrets are made. Take, for instance, the left-handed Ehud, a crafty warrior of Benjamin, who, in order to secure audience with the king of Moab, pretended to have a secret message from God (Judg. 3. 20). By playing the role of a prophet, Ehud disarmed Eglon of suspicion, which cost the fat king his life (Judg. 3. 21). Again, Jonathan pierced the future by means of a dream (1 Sam. 14. 9), as did also the false prophets (Jer. 23. 25). Saul, his superstitious father, invoked the crude primitive devices of heathen witchcraft to ascertain the future (1 Sam. 14. 18). Even David, the man after God's own heart (1 Chron. 28. 9), sought divine knowledge by means of omens (1 Sam. 23. 1-6). The great prophets, however, as we have seen, discarded all heathen devices for gaining divine knowledge and relied solely upon inner convictions of truth born by direct

spiritual communion with God. "The prophet that hath a dream, let him tell a dream; and he that hath my word, let him speak my word faithfully" (Jer. 23. 28).

Godly men, who thus felt themselves upborn of God and could and would reveal the future, cannot be at this distant age easily estimated in regard to their predictive activity unless several important facts relating to their personality and to the popular beliefs of their times be taken into account.

The prophets were by birthright exceptional persons: men of genius, men capable of feeling profoundly, seeing clearly, thinking strongly, acting promptly, and anticipating accurately (2 Sam. 12).

The prophets were men of the hour, molded by their times, called out of great circumstances; such as Nathan, in the crisis of David (2 Sam. 12), Elijah in the struggles of Ahab (1 Kings 17), and Isaiah in the hour of national conflict (Isa. 7, 8). Men of decisive character know how to act in rare moments. Mr. Plimpton, Eldon Parr's paid peacemaker's characterization of John Hodder, reminds one of the prophet

of old: "That's just it. Hodder seems to me, now that I come to think about it, just the kind of John Brown type who wouldn't hesitate to get into a row with Eldon Parr if he thought it were right, and pull down any amount of disagreeable stuff about our ears."

The prophetic atmosphere, the social environment provided a rich spiritual setting for their lives. The prophets, for the most part, were either disciples of former prophets or members of priestly families of prophetic guilds (2 Kings 2. 3-5; 1 Sam. 19. 20; 1 Kings 22. 23; Amos 7. 14).

A Divinely Ordered History

They were conscious of moving in a divinely ordered history which they strove to interpret in the light of an unfolding process. Jehovah planned that history, hence they could anticipate God's movements for the future, obeying the same moral law as in the past. God himself stood over against their souls assuring them. The history of Israel "was unique; prophecy was consequently of divine origin; both hu-

man, both divine to the same extent." Predictions are then to be expected from men set in a divine movement.

Use of Predictive Power

Power to predict the distant future was neither an essential nor a common function of the regular prophets. (1) The earliest and latest prophets exercised this gift most. The mightiest of them were sparing in distant foreclosures; Samuel, for instance, foretold immediate future personal events, while the later prophets dealt in distant national movements. (2) The age of lowest prophetic level predicted most; and (3) the false prophets indulged more freely in foretelling events than did the true. Therefore the predictive function can hardly be considered an essential mark of the prophet. This gift was at most occasional with the mighty men of God, at least so far as detailed, definite, and distant predictions are concerned, such as appear in the book of Daniel, which has become a productive place of some modern exegetical adventurers, who lead curious seekers on hazardous excursions

through the mystical mazes of biblical apocalypses.

The Ideal One of God

The prophets more and more pooled Hebrew hope of the future in an ideal of divine deliverance through a chosen person whom God should clothe with power for the realization of all their hopes (Isa. 53). This prophetic hope found its complete answer in Jesus, whom they foretold in ideal outlines, rather than in exact details. The appearance of Jesus, the Christ, was as much greater and grander than prophetic forecasts as the sun is more glorious than dawn. God enabled the prophets to give the form; but Jesus filled in the details. In Christ, prophetic hope took form; in Jesus, Israel's noblest ideal became flesh and "dwelt among us" (John 1. 14).

How, then, shall we understand predictive prophecy? What was the divine purpose in foretelling events, and in what precise manner did they foretell events? Their primary aim was to encourage and to warn; to spur to right action, or to halt a wrong

course. Predictive prophecy can best be understood in this light as an appeal to popular needs of the prophet's day. Hence, in evil times they dwelt often and glowingly upon a future realization of Israel's ideal, or they predicted some future wrath of God to be visited upon the corrupt world.

With these facts in mind we are now better prepared to estimate prophetic predictions. We turn, then, to the predictive literature most often drawn from by present-day adventurers in "predictive signs" and "fulfillments." Readers are not generally aware of the fact that our modern predictive jugglers draw almost entirely from the Jewish writings incorporated in certain prophetic books, which writings scholars regard as doubtfully prophetic or of a low grade of prophetism. When the blind lead the blind it is with the usual result that both fall in the ditch. Sections in the late minor prophets bear the same earmarks, as does a vast extent of the Jewish literature found in non-biblical books, which goes under the name of "apocalyptic literature."

Character of Predictive Literature

When one turns from the writings of the great social prophets, Amos, Isaiah, Hosea, and Jeremiah, to Daniel, Zachariah, Ezekiel, Malachi, and Joel, a sharp change is experienced. (1) The style of the former writings is simple, direct, and convincing, while the latter writings are often fanciful, mysterious, literal, and full of imagery. (2) The subject matter in which they are interested likewise differs markedly. The former group emphasizes the social righteousness; vehemently denounces the sins of the times; and proclaims divine punishment for sin. The latter group emphasizes the hopeless evil of the present age, the supernatural glory and good of the new age which is anticipated, swift and severe judgment upon God's enemies, a rich and full Messianic element, and a vivid sense of heaven and heavenly beings. (3) They differ again in their objects. The earlier prophets denounce the sinful classes in Israel and call for immediate reform. The latter prophets mainly encourage the faithful to hold on

until the Great Day of Jehovah should bring speedy relief from the present intolerable conditions of God's people.

This latter form of prophecy incorporates not a little of the so-called "apocalyptic" writings, which are hidden and figurative in character and which had to do with secrets of earth, heaven, and the future. For several centuries this type of sacred writings flourished among the Jews and was most abundant in times of sharp collision with the great world empires, Persia, Greece, and Rome. In fact, nearly all of the prophetic writings, from the exile to the opening of the Christian era, contain a liberal sprinkling of prophetic apocalypses.

These fall into two distinct types: (1) those describing a speedy vindication of God's people; (2) those announcing divine judgments upon the heathen. Such sections as Isaiah 24-27, 34-35, 40-66 are among the fullest and finest expressions of the national hope sustained by the older prophetic creed. Such sections reflect prophetic confidence in God's purpose for his people. This purpose was to be accom-

plished through coming judgments, a day of vengeance, the hope of the remnant, and the expected Redeemer.

In this predictive literature the wrath of God on wicked nations and the perfect blessedness of God's people in the future are successively described in graphic pictures. Zechariah 1 to 8 richly pictures the wealth of nations flowing to Jerusalem and the glory of the temple. Chapters 9 to 14 describe the distress that is to precede the coming of God's kingdom. The book of Daniel contains a series of predictions of the fate of Oriental empires (7-12), and not the fate of the present European nations.

Reading the Signs

How shall the Bible student in our day treat this apocalyptic literature? First of all, one may observe that the predictions were either largely in the nature of idealized hopes to be realized in the near future, or historic rehearsals to reassure the drooping hope in trying times. The prophets' messages projected into the future also, because the prophets could foresee the result

of the forces at work. Every moral act is like a locomotive—it draws a whole train of events after it. Though they generally preached to their age, they sometimes saw visions of things to be, because moral law is uniform. This is to some extent the case with preachers of every age. We have a saying, "Coming events cast their shadows before." Mr. Lincoln, in his last debate with Douglas in the fall of 1858, asserted: "That is the real issue—the eternal struggle between right and wrong. It is the same principle in whatever shape it develops itself. It is the same principle that says, 'You toil and work and earn bread, and I'll eat it.' That is the issue that will continue in this country when these poor tongues of Judge Douglas and myself shall be silent." We find ourselves in the heat of that struggle now. Whether in Lincoln or in Isaiah, it is the conviction that the conflict must go on until settled right because God is right and his purposes cannot fail.

The Best Is Yet to Be

Prediction rests first of all upon un-

shaken confidence in the soundness of the world's ethical order. The prophetic creed begat prophetic confidence. His faith found fullness in the future. That which ought to be could be and would be. The ideal must some time become the real. Modern prophetic voices cry out in similar strains: "God is marching on"; "His purpose runs through the lengthening years"; There is "one far-off divine event, to which the whole creation moves"; "No good is ever lost; that which was, is, and ever shall be"; "The best is yet to be." So lisp the poets and the prophets, preachers and statesmen in every time. Even a skeptical scientist, Thomas Edison, could say many years ago: "It is very clear to me that within the next half century science will abolish night. Physically and morally, science will make the world over, and the best part of the great triumph will be witnessed, I believe, within the next fifty years." We are seeing this scientific prophecy fulfilled. Is he not, like the rest, borne on by a confident trust in the dependable order of nature and nature's laws?

Faith's Borderland of To-morrow

To the prophet, sin, suffering, and misery were the most stubborn, ugly, persistent, and damaging facts in the world. The prophet had also a deep ineradicable conviction that sin, suffering, and misery did not belong in the original world order. They can and must be eradicated, for God is against them. He, therefore, confidently looked forward to a better day when peace and plenty, right and love should reign. Every age of humanity has felt that these enemies of society are intrusions which do not properly belong to the order which God has planned. Hence every great leader, reformer, preacher, in the dark hours of his age, has turned his face to the future for relief, and pitched his faith on the borderland of the to-morrow. It was under such conditions of mind that Plato wrote his Republic, Moore his Utopia, Bellamy his Looking Backward, and Jane Addams her Spirit of Youth.

In Israel's history, a long line of prophets, touched by the power of God, for five cen-

turies before Christ's day prophesied the good time coming by the hand of God's "anointed." The darker the national life grew, the higher rose the hope of a glorious future in the prophet's vision until the Jews became a nation drunk with the nectar of Messianism. Through these forecasts Palestine, in Jesus's day, was saturated with the Messianic expectation. Jesus was brought up upon it and responded to its call, which was the plan of God. When he opened his Messianic career he chose to read and apply to himself these words of the prophet, "The Spirit of the Lord God is upon me; because the Lord hath anointed me to preach good tidings unto the meek; he hath sent me to bind up the broken-hearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives, and the opening of the prison to them that are bound; to proclaim the acceptable year of the Lord" (Isa. 61. 1, 2). "To-day hath this scripture been fulfilled in your ears," declared at length the voice of Jesus, the incarnate idea of prophetic ideal as men beheld the Only Begotten of the Father (Luke 4. 21).

Apocalyptic Devices

In the next place, to gain a proper estimate of this type of apocalyptic prophecy the modern reader needs to understand its literary devices, underlying spirit, and forms of symbolism.

In the first place it was probably never intended as a direct prediction for our day. Those prophecy hunters who now seek for signs of fulfillment of ancient apocalypses, supposing that Daniel or any other ancient worthy were speaking of modern times in exact terms of history, are sadly on the wrong track and always run into blind alleys. For two thousand years now their "signs," "prophecies," "expectations," and "set days of fulfillment" have failed miserably. Yet with each generation new guesses are made, no doubt doomed to like failure.

Apocalyptic Consolation

The spirit animating the prophetic apocalypses is that of comfort for troubled Jews who suffered persecutions for their faith. The writer hoped thus to kindle faith

and enable the tired souls to hold on to their religion in the face of the rack. The Apocalypses of Daniel are generally believed by scholars to have been produced by unknown writers about B. C. 165, during the persecutions of the Jews at the hands of the insane Antiochus Epiphanes—produced in the hope of maintaining fidelity to Jewish faith. Therefore the first six chapters are written exhortations in the form of vivid presentations of real and important religious truths, "Trust God and he will keep you." The last six chapters seem to say, "Endure persecution, for your tormentors will come to grief and the righteous will be vindicated in the end." The lodgment of the sacred ideas was everything, the mode of expression had no independent value and much less present application in details.

Apocalyptic Symbolism

The symbolism of this form of literature is unique. Symbolic terms were freely used which had meanings known only to the instructed, so that the Jews' enemies could make nothing of them when they fell into

their hands; for predictions of destructions of the enemy empire, if understood, was treason, hence death to author or possessor. They were a kind of sacred secret code in vogue during the later centuries of Judaism.

The most commonly used symbols and their meanings may be noted in passing: "abomination that maketh desolate" (Dan. 12. 11) had reference to Antiochus's pollution of the altar of burnt offerings by the sacrifice of swine thereon. This phrase had no reference to the Roman Catholic Church, as some exegetical triflers invent. "The time of the end" (Dan. 11. 35) meant the end of Antiochus's persecuting reign and not the end of the world, as some modern expounders vainly imagine; "sealed up" (12. 9) was an expression for veiled predictions. Divine "horses" (Zech. 1. 8) symbolized divine mission; "four horns" (1. 18) symbolized worldly powers opposing Israel; "golden candlesticks" (ch. 4) symbolized restored Israel; "winds of heaven" stood for strife (Dan. 7. 2); "lion" meant strength 7. 4); "bear" signalized devouring greed of the enemy falling upon his victim (7. 5); the

"four beasts" so often repeated no doubt reflected the leading political empires whose hands lay heavily upon Israel (7. 9). Thus the literal was symbolized and the symbolic literalized in order to keep up the faith of the devout in times of trial and to vindicate the ways of God, who could control national destinies for the faithful's final good.

What good can these apocalyptic predictions serve in our time? Surely not as modern history unfolded in detail to ancient prophet, but, rather, as revealing to us the true spirit, the adequate faith, the sound ideas needed now in the fight against evil. The predictions are not as marvelous as the prophetic life which clung unwaveringly to God and banked on the certainty of his goodness, justice, and mercy. A faith that can trust God in the dark is better than assurance of perpetual daylight. The hope that sustains the believer in the hour of persecution is more to be coveted than exact knowledge of events of centuries unborn. It is a misplaced zeal and a barren exegesis which attempts to read modern events as minutely foretold by ancient seers.

CHAPTER XII

THE PROPHETS AND THEIR PERMANENCE

The great German poet Goethe paid this glowing tribute to the Bible: "The great veneration which the Bible has received from so many people and generations of earth is due to its intrinsic worth. . . . The higher the centuries rise in culture, the more will the Bible be made use of by all who are not wise in their own conceits, but truly wise." The "intrinsic worth" of the Old Testament, one might almost say, is comprised in the words of the prophets. At any rate, the high-water mark of Old Testament revelation is recorded in prophecy. While we have seen that not every word of every prophet is permanent, the great ideas enunciated by them are. Whenever and wherever a great truth is declared in any corner of the world, it tends to abide. But when a man freely gives himself in its estab-

lishment, it gains common credence, if not ready obedience. The prophets' writings are saturated with moral and spiritual worth. Sound morals and sound religion such as theirs will not perish from the earth. Like axioms in geometry, they abide. They sounded the cardinal needs of man, and man's intrinsic needs have not greatly changed with time and culture. Wherein, then, consists the abiding worth of prophecy?

The Permanence of Moral Action

First of all, the prophets to a man raised morality above ceremony. "I hate, I despise your feast days," protested Amos, "and I will not smell in your solemn assemblies, . . . neither will I regard the peace offerings of your fat beasts" (Amos 5. 21, 23); "For I desired mercy, and not sacrifice; and the knowledge of God more than burnt offerings," sobbed Hosea (Hos. 6. 6). "Bring no more vain oblations; incense is an abomination unto me," rang out the silver tones of Isaiah. "Cease to do evil; learn to do well" (Isa. 1. 13, 17). "For I spake not unto your fathers," said Jeremiah, "con-

cerning burnt offerings or sacrifices; but this thing commanded I them, saying, Obey my voice" (Jer. 7. 22, 23). "Offer unto the Lord an offering in righteousness," said Malachi, one of the late prophets (Mal. 3. 3). It will remain forever true that righteous conduct is of more consequence than right ceremony. In every age the subtle temptation lies before man to make going to church a substitute for going right, and to let creed substitute deed. As the proverbial Chinaman observed about the Sunday school: "It's all talky talky and no walky walky." Holy worship should inspire holy conduct. This prophetic note needs sounding afresh to each generation. The basis of divine dealing with man is ethical, not ritual; universal, not local; practical, not theoretical.

The Permanence of a Dominating Ideal

In the next place, the prophets' teaching of a supreme ethical and personal God, over all and through all, has never been surpassed. Monotheism as a creed, theism as a philosophy, and Divine Providence as a per-

sonal faith are permanent gains to humanity from prophecy. The modern social emphasis must be grounded in such a faith or sink with its own weight. Enthusiasm for social reform must be fed at some smoking Sinai where God flames forth in personal power, personal law, and personal love. All social endeavors rest back on the theory that man is of supreme worth, therefore worth any effort in his behalf.

The Permanence of the Reign of Law

Again, the prophets spake permanently when they insisted on the majesty of law and the sanctity of obedience thereto. Indeed, their great word was "righteousness." "God is righteous, and he demands righteousness for his people." "To obey is better than sacrifice," was said as early as in Samuel's time (1 Sam. 15. 22). This principle makes a permanent demand upon mankind. Just now we almost worship at the shrine of natural law. But moral and spiritual law is no less exacting than natural law. Modern psychology has shown us the law of psychic action. That no experience

is ever lost to the soul is a fundamental law of psychology. Life is governed by its own inner demands. Society is ruled by social forces which react upon the soul. History is marching to the command of gripping ideas. We now seek the oracles of science for the deliverance of both physical and psychical demands. The laws of God stand fast; the ways of Providence abide. The reign of law is the rule of God. Obedience is life's first demand.

Permanence of Commanding Mastery in Crises

The prophets faced every national crisis with a commanding mastery. A crisis is a time when human values, regarded to have been permanent and steadfast, have suddenly become disturbed, given way, been thrown into a turmoil, so that no one knows what to do next. We are passing through such a crisis now. All is problematic; everyone is guessing; some are trusting, a few others are speculating, and not a few are disheartened. This is the time for the prophet. He knows what to do, for religion

is the only force which is capable of restoring confidence in the hour of uncertainty, of placing men's feet upon the eternal foundations. He, with his religious assurance, reminds us of the fact that there is soundness at the world's center; that God lives, loves, and lords the world; that truth is invincible; that a brighter day is coming; that goodness is winging its way to the goal; and that God cares for his earthly bewildered children. The man who religiously feels the pressure of a firm hand, and drinks in the breath of the unseen world, and views events on God's sweeping horizon, is alone in a position to pilot us through the crisis.

Permanence Rooted in the Imperfect

The roots of the present are only to be found in the past; the stream of the ages has left its rich silt on modern soil; the light of centuries floods our own age. We are debtors to all the past. It has been said that the blood of our own beastly ancestors runs in our curdling veins, and that when you scratch the surface veneer of the modern man the savage with paint and

cudgel appears. It may also be said that the blood of martyrs, prophets, and reformers throbs in our arteries when calls of the heroic are made. The plan of God has long been in the making. The age-long history of the Jews marks the grades in the divine school from the simple Adam to the saintly Christ. Living as we do in the white light of the twentieth-century Christianity, how else shall we understand the Old Testament saints with many wives, slaves, blood revenge, religious intolerance, and polytheistic conceptions? When it is remembered that the past was the clearing house for the present and that the ancient worth became modern good, we will not be scandalized by the standards of early Jewish saints. The early prophets succeeded the early patriarchs. Moses, the prophet, was better than Methuselah, the old patriarch; and the "latter prophets" were better than the "former prophets." Amos was better than Aaron, and Jeremiah was better than Samuel.

The meaning of the above is simply this, that the prophet fell upon a sound principle

when he appealed to the good and true contained in the past, which he used for present needs in the solution of new problems. The Bible supplies a rule that is constantly improving upon itself, and the later editions are intended to antiquate the earlier. (Heb. 1. 1-2; Matt. 5. 21-22). But we must not sin against the Bible by reversing the order and read back into the Old Testament the standards of the New, or wrong the Old Testament saints by thrusting back the ethics of Jesus upon them. That is a burden too grievous to bear. In our present shameful world war we may well profit by reading the past history of warring nations. We would not, however, want the thirtieth-century historian to measure us by his light.

It is, then, a permanent good to read the past into the present, for permanence is hid in the imperfect, but it is vicious to reverse the process and read the present in the past. By the latter, we misjudge the past and misinterpret the future.

Was the prophets' world a strange and far-away world? Was it vastly different

from ours? Yes, in many things it was far removed from our own world. Nevertheless, in its simple needs of reverent, honest, and sympathetic life it differed nothing from our own age. The yearning, burning souls of prophets which then found speech effective in calling men to the requirements of God are needed now. The speech of God in the mouths of preacher-prophets is a permanent need. Therefore the pulpit will not be crowded out by the stage, the Bible will not be smothered beneath magazines, and the preacher will not be silenced by the actor. God has made preaching permanent. The living voice is a permanent necessity.

Permanence in Facing Facts as They Are

Modern, like ancient seers, are frankly facing the facts and prescribing cures. "Our America," writes Dr. George A. Coe of her church life, "is the scene of a warfare of the spirit. . . . The audible voices of religion are not one but many; we have not a church but churches, and these are contrary, the one to the other." Dr. Newell

Dwight Hillis has penned this in one of his recent books: "The human soul is vastly more important than anything else in the world, and you get its history in the novel. . . . To me humanity is the finest of all studies and subjects."

The famous Dr. George A. Gordon, of Boston, soberly comments on this "humanity," that "man's inhumanity to man" is as yet civilization's unblushing crime. Rudolf Eucken, the present preacher-philosopher of the world, looks into the palpitating heart of our modern life and reads the inscription thus: "It is an age afflicted with immense contradictions. It is wonderfully great in the mastery of and achievements within the environing world; but, on the other hand, it is deplorably poor and insincere in regard to the problems of the inner life and the inner world. . . . The interests of the senses have set the standard of life. . . . This type of culture breeds a distinctive type of man: the man of restless intelligence and refined sensuality. He is ready, adaptable, and knows something about everything, but inwardly he is empty,

having no spiritual experience to draw from." To diagnose our "sick souls," as William James would say, is our first duty; to prescribe the remedy the next; and finally to provide spiritual nurses possessed of "healthy mindedness" to restore us to spiritual health.

The Permanence of Simple Truth

The prophets preached a return to the simple, sound realities of life. A study of the prophets tends to lead one away from the confused, unnatural, and artificial demands of life and toward the things which are simple, genuine, and fundamental. The prophet plumbed the depths of the soul and tried to fathom that which is expressive of life at its center. When the priests tried to smother life with formal rules, the prophets tried to evoke the inner spiritual life. They met the hunger of the soul for genuineness, simplicity, and truth. Their protests were always, "Do not push God aside by either substituting doctrines about him or rituals to him; live with God, let the soul bask in his light, drink in his sun-

shine, and realize his presence." This is the kernel of the prophetic thought about the issue of religion.

One cannot undermine this view of life without endangering the foundations of human nature. The prophet's call is to live life to the brim in its normal possibilities as God has given it, to relate life socially in simple, sympathetic neighborliness, and to find God as real as earthly friends. Such honest sincerity of life is permanent. Life itself attests the prophetic claim. Christ and the Christian centuries have put the stamp of permanence upon it. Let simple honesty be more vigorously preached; let sound life be more common; let the modern Christian be more vigorous in practical living. Thereby the power of the church would enlarge.

How our complex artificial civilization needs a call to the simple habits, simple virtues, simple dress, simple modes of life, even simple faith in God! We destroy our chances for happiness by distracting complexities; we confuse life's purpose by sheaf-wise radiations; we strain our nerves to the

snapping point by debilitating amusements; and we burn life's candle at both ends by infinite, but trifling obligations. The cry of Saint Paul becomes us: "Who shall deliver me from the body of this death?" (Rom. 7. 24.)

The Permanence of Readjusting Old Inheritances to New Needs

The prophet had no thought of claiming permanence for his verbal utterances. He attempted rather to relate the earlier religious revelations to the altered needs of a new day. He reconstructed the ideas essential in religion to meet the living demands of his time. He ever rejected earlier outworn dogmas. It is widely recognized that men of the present time find depressing difficulties in existing doctrines of Christianity. These seem often to rest upon artificial claims. Many of our orthodox doctrines are reasoned on external and now extinct presuppositions which were forged on the anvils of mediæval workshops. Though they are repeated with ready familiarity, they fail to find reality in modern

experience. They represent no real experience in our lives, because our age, filled with science, evolution, and realism, has its own characteristic type of thought and teaching. Therefore results are not commensurate with equipments. Christianity should prove more vital, more gripping, more controlling in modern life. Our Christian fundamentals are so essential, so true, so self-evident that we would expect them to be put into actual, living, working practice in our social experience at once without further persuasion. This is not the case, however. Everyone is aware of the wide gap existing between formal Christian claims and commonly accepted practice. The shocking fact faces us that church members in "regular standing," even held up as "successful men," pray in the church and prey in the market place with the same fervor and untroubled conscience; falsify accounts, maim workmen, starve girls into immorality, combine against just claims, receive rents from shameful places, and seem to have utterly forgotten human welfare and social needs. "The damnable cruelty of it

all makes our blood boil." Obviously, our urgent task is to understand our modern life as it really is, and to find what great realities touch the daily life of its preoccupied men and women. The old symbols, doctrines, and phrases do not move the twentieth-century man. Not because he is irreligious, but because he hungers for a religious claim that shall seem to him real and gripping. There is a desire to escape sin, but not in the same way nor for the same reason as the older theology demanded. Bunyan made his "Pilgrim" leave home and family to save himself for the "celestial world." The modern man would deem it a crime to do so. He must be saved where he is. He feels the need of escape from an economic system which makes profits conditioned upon social injustice and business oppressions. The modern man is not saved from his sins until he faces about in his own factory and places actual value upon persons immeasurably above the price of property. Business men's attitude must become different. To make "the indifferent different" is the problem.

In order to effect this change, religion and rubles must be more closely related so that the ideals preached by the church shall find incarnation in the practice of the shop. This can be done by making old truths serve new needs.

Chekhov, the short and realistic story writer of Russia, has a story to the point. A malefactor, barefooted before a magistrate, is questioned thus:

"Here it is—the nut! . . . What were you unscrewing the nut for?"

"If I hadn't wanted it, I shouldn't have unscrewed it," croaks Denis.

"What did you want that nut for?"

"The nut? We make weights out of those nuts for our lines. . . . But can you do without a weight, your honor? If you put live bait or a maggot on a hook, would it go to the bottom without a weight? . . . What the devil is the use of the worm if it swims on the surface! The perch and the pike and the eelpout go to the bottom, and a bait on the surface is only taken by a shillisper. . . . And there are no shillispers in our river. . . . The silliest little boy would not

try to catch fish without a weight. Of course, anyone who did not understand might go to fish without a weight. There is no rule for a fool" (The Witch and Other Stories, Chekhov).

The practical ethics of Denis might be in question, but his reflections about fish weights are sound. The church of to-day might profit by his reasoning. We seem to have plenty of good bait on our ecclesiastical hooks, but lack weights to hold them down. The "nuts" are screwed on the derail tracks. Our modern problem is not lack of bait. We are rich in religious inheritance—in an historical Christianity, logical creeds, organized churches, able ministers, rich laymen, liberal givers, and consecrated leaders. All this fine bait is too near the surface. The fish runs deep. We need to unscrew a few "nuts" for sinkers. The practice of reaffirming old reasons to justify permanent values is to "fish without a weight."

When the social structure and the economic pressure have cut new and deeper channels in civilization, as is the case to-day, the church cannot continue to catch men of

a deeper-going need with the old theological bait. Let us unscrew some needless doctrines on neglected lines of thinking and fasten them to lines of practical angling, to catch faith-hungry moderns who are pushed into waters of the present crisis. Authoritative orthodoxy is seldom other than arrested ecclesiasticism. It is frequently an attempt to conserve the past religious inheritance in mass when such inheritance has become distressing in the face of a changed age. The structure of civilization is shifting outward in the direction of larger freedom, franker experience, finer religious realities, and wider cooperative action. Let us suit the old heritage to the new needs and sink our Christian bait into the intellectual and actual depths where the stream of modern life flows.

The Permanence of Self-Communicating Providence

There is permanence in the view of the prophets that God communicated his infinite will to man. God spake and God speaks. The prophet spake convincingly

out of his living experience the truths of God. The priest, on the other hand, appealed to the written page, the inscribed law, the posted ordinance. He was bound to a dead letter. The prophet depended upon the quickening spirit. Jesus, our Lord, sanctioned the prophetic consciousness of living communication by the Holy Spirit. Jesus assured his followers of the guidance of the self-communicating presence who should lead them into all truth (John 17). Is not this a permanent belief of the Christian Church which inspires, assures, convinces, and consoles the children of God's kingdom? Let us not suppose that we can dispense with the need of God's self-communicating Spirit in modern life. In this self-satisfied, matter-stuffed, pleasure-loving, money-mad age a fresh fervor in spiritual reality is not only a dire necessity but a growing quest. Each age is religiously re-created in terms of a fresh, personal spiritual awakening, based upon values which have endured. The Hebrew prophets lived and spoke better than they realized. We clasp hands with them across the space

of time and take fresh courage and counsel from them in our present crisis. Above the boom of bursting shells is heard the still small voice, into the blood-drenched trenches shines the blazing sun, and over the bleeding world bends a wounded figure whispering: "Peace, be still. Let not your hearts be troubled. Believe in God."

> The prophets knew themselves as true,
> And so they spoke in tongues quite new;
> The way of God they understood,
> Revealing it as best they could.
> What thus they left on written page
> Remains quite true from age to age.

Spiritual interests are paramount. "Democracy itself stands or falls with this faith."

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